

THE HONEYSUCKLE
AND THE BEE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE HONEYSUCKLE AND THE BEE

BY

SIR JOHN SQUIRE



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To

ALICE WARRENDER

*This prelude to a more chronological
set of recollections.*

FIRST DAY

“WELL, why don’t you?” said she.

I had just remarked that the way I should really like to take a holiday would be by going through the South and West of England on a horse. I had, I said, when young, done a very great deal of walking in those parts. I had regularly walked home from Cambridge to Devonshire, and, later on, I had done several long walks with nothing in my pocket except what I picked up by cutting people’s grass or holding horses’ heads. Then, after the war, for year after year, I had escaped the urban pressure in a car and investigated inns and churches and just rung up anybody I knew within driving distance for a bed for one night. But cars, I said, go too fast, and have to be driven, and tempt one to go too far. And, on foot, I said, one sometimes gets impatient with dull country, and annoyed because one cannot see over the hedges. “A horse,” I said, “would be the ideal thing; a horse at a walking pace with just an occasional trot.”

“Well, why don’t you?” said she.

“All sorts of reasons,” I replied. “For one thing I don’t suppose that nowadays you could get a horse put up in this country. When I was young every country pub had ‘Good Accommodation for Man and Beast’ written up on it. The sign might well still stand as half the motorists are beasts, but they don’t expect horses

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now and they'd be staggered if one presented them with one. The modern innkeeper probably doesn't even know what horses eat."

"Nonsense," said she, "they'd always be able to give your horse a shake-down somewhere and you could always get provender from a neighbouring farmer."

"Perhaps you're right," said I, "but the drawback is that I haven't got a horse."

"Can't you buy one?" she exclaimed impatiently.

"That's precisely what I can't do," I said, "because I can't afford it."

"Then," she rejoined with the logic of her sex, "why don't you take a holiday on foot, write a book about it, and buy a horse with the proceeds?"

"And then," I continued, "take a holiday on the horse, write a book about it and buy a Rolls-Royce with the proceeds. And then take a holiday in the Rolls, write a book and buy a steam-yacht (which I've always wanted) with the proceeds and then . . ."

I was interrupted.

"Don't dodge," said she. "It would do you all the good in the world to go off on foot again. As a matter of fact, I don't believe you could."

That is the way one is made to do things. "Can't I?" thought I. But what I said was: "I daresay a little solitude would do me good, and I shall start off on Monday." That is precisely what I did.

But first I had to decide where to go. And then I thought: "Why not walk home to Devon as you used to do?" And then, my mind wavering over that varied country, which seemed in youth so illimitable, thinking

of Dartmoor, Exmoor, the Tavy valley, Bideford Bridge, the grey moorland churches, the rich fabrics of Ottery and Cullompton, I thought suddenly of my old school, Blundells, within four miles of that last. It would be empty and I would go there for an hour or two, wander about, and recover the past.

It was three years since I had felt that nostalgia and made that resolution: and then I did not keep it. The feeling came to me in a strange place and an indirect way.

Far from the stage, at the back of the circle, I stared across the vast arena of Drury Lane at the shifting scenes of Mr. Coward's *Cavalcade*, taking an infantile pleasure in the skilful reproduction of a railway station in a fog, the departure of a steamer, and other spectacles which one can see any day without paying even entertainment tax. The connecting thread of story may have been a "bald and unconvincing narrative," but nothing ever stayed long enough to become tedious, and it was exciting never to know what was coming next—a storm, an earthquake, a fire, Queen Victoria reviewing the troops, General Booth addressing his followers in the Albert Hall, W. G. Grace, huge and bearded with a shrivelled red-and-yellow M.C.C. cap, marching to the wicket at Lord's, or a vast assembly of Liberals singing that ineffable "Land Song." There wasn't room for these: there was so much else. But one was swept through a pageant of the last thirty-two years.

And one made, like everybody else, all the appropriate comments. Included amongst these was: "How clever of this very clever young man to recover the atmosphere

of the South African War which ended when he was in the cradle; fancy his knowing all about 'Dolly Gray' and the C.I.V.s and the legend of the old Queen whose presence covered the Empire like a canopy!" And then—for I was fifteen when it started and eighteen when it ended—I remembered the South African War myself, recovering things in my mind which I had no idea were there. And one thing that came back was a tune not found amongst those resurrected by Mr. Coward.

It was 1902, all those years ago, and in the summer term; the war dwindling to an end, in spite of all the efforts of that surprising guerillist De Wet, and peace in sight. Peace was more than in sight for me; it was present: I was swathed and bathed in it, as I have never been since I emerged into a struggling world. I was in the upper sixth—peaceful even there, as I had just become what was then a rare bird, namely a History Specialist, had bid a lifelong farewell to Trigonometry, Conics, Dynamics, Statics, Hydrostatics and the whole of that mathematical harem with which I can hardly now believe I was ever involved, and was allowed to sit by myself at the back of the Classical Sixth Form Room, nobody even guessing that propped up against my pile of works by Dicey, Bryce, Bagehot, Seeley, Cunningham and the like, all full of quotations from Aristotle and wool-prices under Edward III, were rather lighter compositions by Haggard or Merriman. I had, as I shared a study with the Head of the House, more fags than anyone was officially allowed or I knew what to do with. I was privileged to avoid cricket—which I enjoyed, though bad at it, but enjoyed exercising a privilege more.

Plenty of friends, an easy-going temperament, not a worry in the world. Cambridge and more *dolce far niente* ahead, then perhaps the Indian Civil Service—which to school-boys of that time did not mean service, danger, heat, tiffin, polo, or anything in the world but that pension of £1,000 a year on early retirement, which all our elders dinned into our ears as a sublime inducement. Had I gone I should be taking it now, minus a ten-per-cent cut; and a lot it would be worth . . . !

Yes, it was a lovely summer afternoon: a sky of unbroken purity, a light wavering breeze, and a row of great trees flinging patches of blue shadow on the long quiet red sandstone wall of School and School House, and the square tower, with its flag, its clock, and its empty niche for the founder's statue, which his shade has been expecting for over three hundred years. There was nobody about: they were all playing games in the field beyond the buildings, and not even the click of ball on bat could be heard. Hours before or hours afterwards, the drive and the road behind would have been full of hurrying boys carrying books or implements of play. Now there was no one.

A fag had brought me a rug; another a deck-chair, should I prefer the seated posture; one or other of them had also brought my book. There I lay in flannels and a red, black and white blazer, propped on my right elbow, the daisied, tree-shadowed lawn all round. What the book was I do not remember. It was not that summer but the next—my last—that I went through the six green volumes of the old Aldine Spenser in such beautiful weather and places that I can never think of

Una or Britomart without also thinking of a field of golden charlock, mounting larks, and a deserted canal covered with lilies.

“A gentil knighte was pricking o’re a plaine——”

I seldom open Spenser now; but if I do, that scene comes back. A field at the end of a grass-grown, blind-alley lane; a gate on the right; a push at the gate; and then subsidence into that mustard-yellow field, and the company of Spenser’s crooning stanzas, heroes, villains, injured ladies and beasts, even the most boring of the stories lovely because of the music, and no thought taken of the allegories about Queen Elizabeth, Lord Essex and so on which I have heard about since.

It wasn’t Spenser that sunny afternoon. It may have been *Erewhon*, of which there was an early (perhaps a first) edition in the school library; it may have been *Moby Dick*, *Typee* or *Omoo*, which were all also there. Whatever it was I laid it down, whilst the small gusts of June breeze brought the melting strains of the town brass-band to my ear:

“You are my honey, honeysuckle,
I am the bee——”

The words meant nothing; but at that distance there was a bee-like murmur about the tune, and a plangency—an augury of life which one had not yet encountered, and a summary (though one did not know it and felt it but vaguely) of all the regret of later years for early years, in a fifth and a third. Then, the tune carried me into some vague infinite; but now it carries me back to

scenes then concrete and commonplace, but now irrecoverable and poignant. . . .

As I walked out of London, knapsack on back, and the temperature over eighty degrees, I recovered something of my youth. I had last walked up Putney Hill in 1907. It was just before lunch-time; a toothbrush was my only luggage; I left London with one and threepence in my pocket; I ate bread and oranges; I mistook the way from Guildford in the dark and went to Alton by way of Godalming, instead of over the Hog's Back; and I then went to Salisbury through Romsey instead of through Stockbridge. It made the journey not much less than a hundred miles, and I was in Salisbury twenty-eight hours after I started, having snatched half-hours of sleep under gorse-bushes and in woods. But as for Putney, going up that hill, and having passed the very unimposing portals of "The Pines," I was thinking of Algernon Charles Swinburne.

It was a legend amongst my generation that Theodore Watts-Dunton kept him strictly under control (having rescued him from the brandy-bottle) but allowed him to take a morning walk to an inn on Putney Common where the landlord had strict injunctions to allow him one bottle of beer and no more. Contemporaries of mine at Cambridge had timorously ventured into the inn and observed the poet, whom no one dared, and no decent person wished, to accost, and returned to the university to report that the legend was true. As I went up the hill my brain was singing with:

“When the hounds of spring are on winter’s traces”
and

“With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain,”

and I was wondering whether I should have the hardihood to go into the “Green Man” and peer sideways at the little old man who in his flamboyant youth had written those lines. It wasn’t necessary. For in the middle of Putney Hill I met him, coming back from his modest morning potation.

He was almost a dwarf, almost a gnome, very short, with a huge bald forehead, a shapeless black hat perched thereon, a smooth face, an attenuated grey-red beard, long neck, champagne-bottle shoulders and tiny feet, and an old rusty overcoat. Just as I approached him he stopped to give pennies and a pat on the back to two little urchins who were playing with a hoop. This was the roaring Republican who had made England shiver with his denunciations of throne, hearth and altar. I had an impulse to stop and speak, and then a better impulse not to stop and speak; after I had passed the benevolent little thing I couldn’t help turning round. He was still there, still talking to the children. He was probably late for lunch, in which event I feel sure that Watts-Dunton sternly reproved him.

Yes, but that was nearly thirty years ago. George Meredith also was alive then, and him also I had seen, sitting on Edward Clodd’s balcony at Aldeburgh, a rug over his knees and a pile of yellow French novels on the table at his side. There hadn’t been a war then. It was only two terms since I had first met Rupert Brooke,

"young Apollo golden-haired" in a Cambridge street—he was a freshman and his serenity and beauty made, even at the first casual encounter, such an impression on me as I never received from any other man. King Edward was on the throne, Campbell-Bannerman was Prime Minister, Asquith was a coming man, we had a Two-Power Standard on the seas, and, for me, I was taking a brief and inexpensive holiday from a Plymouth daily paper, now extinct, which was staffed by very good fellows who were supposed, in some mysterious way, to be training me for a writing career. Long, long ago. But Putney has not changed, and as I passed "The Pines" everything came back and I half expected to see Swinburne rambling down the hill again. But, stop: weren't there horse-buses then, and wasn't there a white one that went to Putney now gathered to its fathers with the "Monster," the "Angel," and all the rest of them? I suppose so; but they seemed so ordinary then that one didn't notice them.

So, remembering rather regretfully that I had not accepted an invitation to "The Pines" from Watts-Dunton in 1913, I got to the Heath and turned right along what, in that earlier year, had been a pleasant quiet road, shaded by birch and ash, with glimpses of ponds through the trees, and an occasional dray, carriage or trap driving along it, but is now the Portsmouth Road, with its swarming Kingston By-Pass, no place at all for a foot-passenger. Being of an equable temper, I did not fret because of the stream of eager drivers rushing towards me, or the perpetual hooting behind me of people exasperated at the continued existence of mere

legs and feet: I merely thought: "I shall get out of this soon; anyhow, one doesn't get covered with dust as one used." So on I trudged; my forehead was streaming with sweat but I was glad that I was disappearing for a time, that neither letters nor telephone messages would reach me, that I could start when I liked and stop when I liked, that time, rain and shine meant nothing to me, that I could converse or be silent with whomsoever I met, and that no one could interfere, or would even know, whether I slept under a hedge or (again, freely, under a real or a false name—which last I didn't!) in a hotel. I had recovered, thought I, my youth.

But not altogether, thought I, a little later. After I had passed Coombe and the Equitation School which heralds the Kingston By-Pass, I saw a policeman, and the sight reminded me of the difficulties of recovering the past completely. A series of pictures passed through my mind evoked by memories drawn from walks a generation ago.

For instance: When I was at Cambridge I made a habit of walking home to Devonshire, usually through Oxford, where I picked up Francis Burrows, of Lincoln, who had been at school with me—the Oxford term ending a little later than ours. The beginning of the journey was always the same—Madingley Hill, with about the only view of Cambridge which shows town and towers in the Oxford manner, St. Neot's with its bridge, Bedford with its countless swarms of boys and girls bicycling home from school to the colonels' wives who bore them, Wolverton, Stony Stratford, Newport Pagnell, Buckingham and Bicester. It was a pleasant

route, though unexciting. One passed over a bridge, which went over a railway bridge, which went over a canal; one passed, also, a signpost pointing to Olney, whose spire could be seen in the distance, but I never followed the road to it. Except for the few small towns little can have changed since Cowper (who, even in his age, had to lament some change) wrote:

The poplars are felled, farewell to the shade,
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade.

There was no traffic, the country was undulating and modestly wooded, and passers-by were few. Here and there one would encounter an old pedlar squatting under the hedge rearranging the cheap jewellery and reels of cotton, ribbons and scissors which the innocent cottagers' wives of that day welcomed as Zulus welcome glass beads. Here and there one might stop for a pipe and a talk with a vagrant, usually a moustached veteran of the South African and Frontier Wars, confessedly restless. And, in the heat of the day, there was always an inn at a road's angle, elm-shaded and with wooden benches in front, where a waggoner's horses slumbrously drooped their heads while their driver quenched his thirst.

George Morland would not have been uncomfortable there and then. He certainly would not like it now on any road approaching the "Major" category—cars, motor-bicycles, motor-vans, advertisements and above all a law, which Morland would never have understood, enjoining men to take their beer at certain hours of the day and not at certain others. Bread and cheese and beer at five past two is no longer in the country

obtainable or legal; and we have to console ourselves by reflecting that at least we do not have dictators who take away our liberties.

I have not travelled that road for thirty years; I will not say that I never shall again, for I am not one of those who take a pleasure in losing as many things as they possibly can. I may even find again the beechwood into which I escaped from the sultriness of a summer afternoon, and where I took out a pencil and a little black notebook, which I still have, and began a verse, expecting, in the warm hush, the presence of Pan, fauns and nymphs, and finding only silence, smooth trunks, great curlings of leaves and shadows dappling the undergrowth, which was quite good enough. Once again I may see a distant train leaving astern a level row of white puffs, seemingly motionless behind a thin row of tall poplars. And once again I may find a pair of old stone gates and wonder what lies behind the curving avenue. Whether I do or not, at least the road, in the end, bends into Oxford, and, ultimately to the Oxford of the colleges.

There did I always stay for a night, playing billiards, which to the Oxford undergraduates of that day was (I believe) in taverns a prohibited game. At Cambridge the game was played everywhere. Saloons were numerous, and one could openly enter for a trophy called the University Cue in order to be beaten by a little Chinaman. And from Oxford, term after term, we sallied forth, resolved always to take a new route to the west, as far as we were able.

Once we started rather late, intending to walk all

night and find, in the morning, not bed and breakfast, but breakfast and bed. We climbed out of the town, remembering what snatches of Matthew Arnold we could, and it was midnight and moonlight before we reached Faringdon, now adorned by one of the newest and one of the tallest of Folly Towers, Lord Berners'.

Our clothing—tweed coats and grey flannel trousers—was much what might be expected of walking youths to-day: the *laudator temporis acti* was quite wrong who, the other day, grumbled in the Press that thirty years ago undergraduates all wore smart lounge suits like the gentlemen they then were but, alas, no longer are. But we had on our heads soft felt slouch hats of a somewhat Colonial type; and that was a day when nobody wore soft hats, and to go out without a hat at all was to invite jeers and following from infants everywhere and lumps of coal from the miners of Radstock. These hats were suspicious in themselves; so was walking at night; so was walking in step. We had passed most of the way up the dark street, not a dog barking, not an owl hooting, no other sound expected, and the last bedroom light just being extinguished in the "Star Inn," when suddenly a shadow loomed out of a doorway and a bull's-eye lantern was flashed in our eyes. "Where are you off to?" asked a deep and surly voice. "Swindon," we replied. "You come along o' me," said the policeman, "you're deserters."

Had we not been so astonished at first and then amused, we might have reflected, made a bolt for it, and had some fun in the dark woods with the county constabulary, which an innocent person, in such

circumstances, is perfectly entitled to do. But unreadiness, and perhaps a latent (however deeply latent) sense of law and order, and perhaps curiosity as to what would happen, made us accompany the constable like lambs. He took us into a room, catechized us at length, and ultimately let us go on, very charily. We arrived at Swindon footsore, cold and stiff at six and did manage to get beds in a wretched little lodging-house. We were asked if we minded lodgers having just got out of them. We were too tired to mind anything—even the discovery, half a minute later, that our predecessors between the sheets must have been firemen or greasers who slept in their clothes.

That was one experience with the police which, pausing for a rest on the Portsmouth road, I thought would probably not be repeated. I remembered another. In the year 1907 I walked from Devonshire to London in ragged clothes and with a horrible beard—breaking the journey for a night or two at Balliol where I temporally lapsed into such civilization as the place has to offer. I started with about eighteenpence, occasionally slept in woods, haystacks (it is unpleasant to have a rat biting one's nose when one is asleep) and casual wards, and now and then replenishing my purse with sixpences earned by holding horses' heads or cutting people's grass. One night, about the time of the closing of inns, after a whole day of rain had rained itself out, I crawled into a hamlet somewhere west of Frome. I saw a lighted doorway, obviously that of a public-house, with a bareheaded man standing at the top of the steps against the light and a group of persons below saying good night

to each other and to him: "Goo'night, Bill," "Goo'night, Ern," and all the traditional, ritual, rigmarole. "A bed at last," thought I, and modestly approached. For I had over two shillings.

"Can you give me a bed for the night?"

"No; full up."

"I don't care what it is, as long as it some sort of shakedown?"

"Full up; better try the next place."

"But anything will do. I've got money, look! Even a lie down in a barn or shed."

At this point I observed that the departing drinkers, mostly hobbledehoys of twenty in the so-called "jolly" stage, were clustering all round me and nudging me; and then, before I could say more, either by way of menace or appeal *ad misericordiam*, a policeman, greeted on all hands with: "'Ere, look at 'im, Sam," barged through the muster and towered over me, asking what this was. All were silent; "*Conticuerunt omnes*," as Virgil remarks at the beginning of the second book of his *Æneid*—which, for some reason, at school, I was made to learn before the fourth and sixth books, never coming to the first book at all until, in later life, I thought I might as well learn a little Latin. "I was asking the landlord for a bed for the night," I explained. The policeman, a big hog-faced man, shot his face forward at mine, and glared in a manner meant to be terrifying to me and comic to his friends. "We've seen your sort here before," he said; and looked around to the rustics for applause, and got it in a sort of blend of cheer and hoot. "But," I protested, remembering some sort of second-hand, word-of-mouth

information, "there is a law that every landlord is bound to give anybody who comes some sort of bed, and food too, if he can pay for it." "'Ark at 'im," observed the august embodiment of the law; and, in the wan lamplight in the middle of that world of dark dampness, the flushed faces of his comrades assumed an uglier look while, with a suspicion of bared teeth, they let forth gusts of wolfish laughter. The policeman, born leader of men, now assumed the air of a dictator implacably condemning a helpless suppliant.

"You better move on," he said. "You ain't goin' to sleep nowhere in this parish. They'll look after the likes o' you along the road."

I prepared, though soaked and fatigued, to plod again my far from homeward way. Just as, with difficulty, I had elbowed my way out of the little crowd, the constable's coarse voice was again uplifted behind me. "Boys," he shouted, "wot price that for a German spy!" This, as the Americans were later to put it, was "a new one on me," but even with Thermopylæ in mind, I could think of no practical way out except trudging on, pretending to take no notice. Trudge on I did. They followed me some distance along the muddy road, hooting and cat-calling; I went on, not turning my head, and the clamour gradually died away as they faded off to their homes and warmth. A mile or so out, the sky having cleared of clouds and an arch of cold stars come out, I rested under a hedge, a dripping elm above me, lit a pipe and endeavoured to become indignant. I failed. Nothing with the element of the comic in it could ever make me indignant, nor anything in life, I think, except

cold-blooded cruelty to the helpless. Also I remembered some other policemen I had met that selfsame day. One, in the morning, a large kind man, who had looked compassionately at my ragged waterproof, passed the time of day and asked me what I was. I pitched, in the usual way, the usual yarn about being a "clurk" pronounced to rhyme with the work of which I was in search, and I had had to take his offered sixpence, because it would have been beastly (and discouraging to him) to admit that I was a hoax. And then, somewhere on the Taunton-Langport road, just about noon, I had been trudging along in such rain as I had never encountered before. Pillars and flung splashes of it came down; my hat dripped, my hair was soaked, my eyebrows poured water on to my spectacles, rain ran in runnels down my neck, front and back, my chest was wet, my mackintosh was heavy with flood, my boots were full of water, and the road at which I patiently stared was a muddy lake with clayey islands in it. I splashed along, empty of all thought, when suddenly I heard trotting behind me and a trap suddenly stopped at my side. Two men in shiny waterproofs were in it, and the driver offered me a lift which I jumped at. They then resumed their conversation as though I (very down at heels, be it remembered) did not exist, and very peculiar and touching it was. For they were plain-clothes men in pursuit of an absconding thief and they did not want to catch him, because they knew him and were sorry for him.

He had been embezzling his employer's money, and had just disappeared with a last lump of it. He was, I learnt by overhearing from the back, a decent quiet

citizen, and his temptation had been great, as he had an extravagant wife about whom the policemen used blunt words. Their instructions were to "comb" all the inns of the district, as it was believed that the fugitive would wish to drown his sorrows in drink. Their technique was simple and effective. They rolled up to the front door of an inn with a great clatter and loud talk and took so long descending and entering that there was plenty of time for their quarry to get out of the back door. Somebody would arrest him sometime, but they didn't want it to be themselves; they had played snooker with the poor fellow. Ultimately we stopped at a rather imposing tavern. The two men got down, so did I, and I was just going to leave them with humble and hearty thanks, when the senior one, remarking that I was wet and probably hungry and could do with a bit of lunch, suggested that I should hold their horse's head while they were eating and then go in and have whatever I liked, which would be charged to them. Pelting as it was, and whetted though my appetite was by a rumour of roast beef, I declined the hospitality as I knew I was a fraud, held the horse's head for half an hour in the rain and felt myself entitled to the sixpence (which got me bread and cheese) which they ultimately gave me. . . .

And—for it took much less time to remember (although I was frequently distracted by the pace of the cars or the oddity of their occupants) than it does now to write—as I lit a second cigarette before resuming my pack and my journey I thought of one more encounter with the Force which was likelier to happen to a young man than to a sedate citizen of my present age.

In the Summer Term of 1905 a man I knew in Sidney Sussex became (a) enamoured of a young woman; (b) determined to see as much of her as possible; and (c) bitten by the theatre. He therefore conceived the notion of forming a theatrical company which should tour East Anglia during the Long Vacation, the high motive being provided by his determination to give all his profits to the East Anglian hospitals. The girl, who later became his wife, arranged to come under the protection of an aunt; a number of undergraduates produced a sufficiency of sisters and friends, a professional leading lady was brought along by a Clare man who could talk about a lot of actors and actresses by their Christian names, halls were booked in three shires, and a week after term ended we assembled at Bury St. Edmunds for rehearsals.

The excursion lasted several weeks. The plays we did were chosen because they were out of copyright. *East Lynne* was discussed, and, much to my regret, turned down; but we had *The School for Scandal*, a comedy of the eighteenth century by Planché, full of marquises and minuets, called *The Follies of a Night*, Robertson's *Still Waters Run Deep*, and for pastoral purposes (for we knew several archdeacons with nice gardens) a work in very dull blank verse called *King René's Daughter*. Little of these last three can I now recall. In *Still Waters* the villainous captain who tried to make the tempted wife elope with him lured her with the prospects of "the orange groves of Seville"; and the lady, when saved, said to her strong, stern husband: "Tell me of my faults, John, and I will try to correct them." In *King René's*

Daughter I was allotted the part of a venerable Arab physician named Ibn Yahya, who droned interminable sage speeches through a long white beard in front of the archidiaconal rhododendrons and laurels, while rows of garden-party ladies sat on chairs and waited patiently for their tea. We made no profits for the hospitals. Here and there, as at Felixstowe, where there must have been a shortage of pierrots that year, we played to packed, and easily pleased audiences, but in some of the town halls of the Suffolk backwoods we used anxiously to peep through the curtains in the hope that enough people would arrive to pay for the rent of the hall; while once, at Bury I think, we acted in a vast old semi-derelict theatre to a few dimly descried and scattered pilgrims who might have been left over, with the decorations and the cobwebs, from the last visit of Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Crummles. We learned what it was to stand about on junction platforms on Sunday, and also what theatrical lodgings were like. These last had to be booked in advance, and our advance agent used to go ahead of us to make these and other arrangements and get bills out, usually rejoining us at night. His name I need not mention here: he is now an imposing country clergyman; and he had concocted for himself the remarkable alias of Eli Maggott, which appeared on the programmes, and must have astonished the landladies when he left his cards on them.

There came a day when he thought he would like a rest, and I was asked to deputize for him; I was to go to Felixstowe, do our business and then return to, I think, Mildenhall. When I had finished at Felixstowe I thought

to myself that I would like a walk, so I decided to walk through the night and get to Mildenhall at least for lunch next day. I was not ideally equipped for all weathers; I had no hat, no kind of overcoat or mackintosh, and instead of the customary stout brogues, my feet were adorned by a pair of dancing pumps of the old bow-ribboned type. However, it didn't look like rain, and, after some beer and sandwiches off I started.

About twelve midnight, the sky being dark, a cool breeze blowing, and the streets deserted, I reached without adventure the middle of Ipswich when, under a street lamp, I was brought to a stop by a policeman.

"Where are you going?"

"Mildenhall."

"What are you going to do there?"

"I'm in a theatrical company which is acting there, and I'm walking all night."

"You have no visible means of support."

My pocket was full of silver. I pulled out a handful of it and showed it to him. "I'm afraid you're wrong there," I said politely. He was a resourceful man, and I admit that his next remark aroused my admiration.

"Where did you get that money from?" he asked, in a suspicious growl. My explanation that it was my own appeared to satisfy him; he let me go and I marched on and out of the town.

I had walked, I suppose, for half an hour and was on a dusty road between hedges, thinking about anything in the world except policemen, when I heard a bicycle bell behind me. I turned round and before I knew where I was I was lit by three lamps on three bicycles besides

which three policemen were standing, one of them being my original interrogator. It was evident that he had shrunk from tackling so dangerous a customer as myself alone, and gone back to the station with his alarming report to secure reinforcements. "You'd better come back with us," said the senior member, a man with a heavy Kitchener moustache. I expostulated, protested, spoke of charges and legal rights, all to no avail; my depression became worse when I was made to mount the step of one of the bicycles and take hold of a policeman's shoulder, for the sharp step almost cut my foot in half through my thin sole and it was with great difficulty that I kept myself from groaning. However, we got to the station and went into the comparative glare of the office. Nobody of importance seemed to be in charge. My name and alleged occupation and habitat (there were sneering smiles and references to "a pretty sort of student" when I mentioned my college) were taken down; and I was then informed that I should be looked after in the morning. An officer took a key and walked down a little passage to open a cell, while another pointed at a pile of mattresses standing endways up against a wall and told me one of them was mine. I stood and stared in my inexperience, when he exclaimed: "Well, do you think I'm going to carry it in for you?" I took the hint, shouldered the heavy thing, carried it to the cell, laid it on the bed, and was then locked in. "Oh well," I thought, as I curled myself up on it, "it's quite warm and this is as amusing a way of spending a night as any, but I must say I'm glad I'm not a poor homeless man whom nobody knows." I had shut my eyes and had almost

forgotten where I was when I heard a loud and continuous crackling in the straw of the mattress underneath me. I sat up sharply. "Mice?" I wondered, and then the revolting truth dawned on me. I had never seen or heard bed-bugs before; but these could be nothing else and there must be scores of them. Feeling slightly sick I got up, beat on the door and called out. Probably they were used to such noises there; at all events nobody took the slightest notice; and there was only one thing for it—I must stand in the corner until morning brought release.

I did; I daresay for five hours; until a turnkey came (the huge insects were by then visible on the floor) and led me along to the little office where a benevolent-looking chieftain was now sitting with a large book open in front of him. It did not take long to convince this sensible being that a mistake had been made. He became almost effusively kind and ordered me a mug of hot cocoa and some slabs of bread and butter which I consumed in his presence. I shook hands, went out, and sat by the parapet of a bridge glad of the fresh air.

When I got to Mildenhall, by train, most of my friends merely guffawed; the single serious one, a person very strong on the liberties of the subject and the insolences of "a little brief authority," was passionately keen that I should kick up the devil of a row about wrongful arrest, sue for damages, and have the Ipswich Police Force turned upside down. I simply couldn't, partly because I was too indolent, partly because I loathed rows, and partly because I was afraid I might get that jackass of a constable the sack.

"I don't believe I shall walk a whole night on this trip," I meditated on the Portsmouth road, "and I don't believe they'd arrest me if I did, and I am sure I could not persuade anybody I was an out-of-work clerk who wanted sixpence for grass-cutting. Here am I, comfortably clad, with a knapsack on my back, and enough money to get me to Devonshire. Even granted that I could still bleat my woes in a Cockney accent without giving myself away by either self-consciousness or grins, how could I, without going into an impossible concealment, grow a shaggy beard? Where should I acquire the right kind of clothes? Could I now, with the price of a bed on me, sleep in a damp wood with pheasants flopping about? And what on earth should I do with my pack and my money, how should I explain my sound garments, all with my name on them, if I really did try to see again the inside of a Casual Ward?" I realized now that I had been silly when I had airily toyed with the idea of sampling a few modern Casual Wards with a view to comparing them with those of a generation ago; I hadn't at all foreseen all the arrangements that would have to be made, nor why I should even have to get two new pairs of spectacles, for they certainly wouldn't swallow my yarn at a "Spike" if I turned up in tortoiseshell rims, let alone the obvious golfing shoes. "Another time, perhaps," I sighed, wondering whether the bread was still so hard at that place in Wiltshire, or the porridge so thin in the Ward at Isleworth.

Isleworth Workhouse. I haven't seen it since I slept there; I didn't even remember to ask if I might revisit it, as it were semi-officially, when I was a Parliamentary

candidate for the neighbouring constituency of Brentford and Chiswick. Was there still, I wondered, a forlorn hedge leading to it in which the more experienced vagrants hid their pennies before going in for the night? Did an official still stand over one in one's bath with a fearsome brush, like a witch's broom, in case one needed a little extra scrubbing? Were the wire mattresses still so near the skin, and still framed on such stout lines that they left red diamond patterns on one's flesh?

All these thoughts and many others passed through my mind as, walking mechanically, feeling singularly free, and not taking too much notice of surroundings with which I was very familiar, I passed through Cobham, up the hill under the iron bridge, and then past the woods and along that undulating piece of pretty common which skirts the Horticultural Gardens at Wisley. It was late afternoon, the sun very hot, there was not much traffic, and I thought I would sit down again. I went a few yards in, took off my pack, and sat down under a bush. I had barely lit a cigarette when I noticed in front of me a man who obviously knew a great deal more about Casual Wards than I did. He was holding an unlit stump of a cigarette, and asked me in a gentle voice for a match. I asked him to join me in a cigarette; he took one, sat down beside me, and looked ruminatively towards the horizon. As he sat down I noticed that his big toes were out of his boots and both were encrusted with blood.

His face startled me with a resemblance. It was weak and delicate, but the straight, sensitive features, the nose thin and just faintly tilted, his soft, pointed, prematurely-white

beard, and blue eyes, might all have been those of George Meredith—and, oddly, he was also a Welshman. He looked ill, and he was in thin rags, but he was obviously eager to talk, and it was pathetic to notice his rapid changes from enthusiasm to the hopelessness of a man who calmly contemplates opening an arterial vein.

With the fluency of his race he soon gave me all the personal particulars about himself, showing his army papers. He was a native of Cardiff, forty, unmarried, a mason by trade and had had no work since the Welsh depression set in. He was now, as is the wont of these lost wanderers, on the way to some quite unlikely and unpromising place (he had probably heard of it from some other tramp), as it might be Lincoln or Grimsby. He had no hope really; and when, in his soft tenor voice with its Welsh accent, he spoke of suicide it was rather in meditation than in menace. He made no attempt to beg, or to move my compassion by whining; he just soliloquized on, occasionally turning his wistful eyes to me as I prompted him with questions.

He came to a pause and then, as though he were speaking of some place which he had known long ago, he asked me directly: "Do you know Cardiff?"

I said I had been there.

"Do you know Cathays Park?" he went on.

I said I did.

"Aren't those buildings grand?" he exclaimed.

I did my best to do justice to those imposing classic piles which house the National Library, the County Council and various other institutions, certainly the most ambitious piece of modern planning in this country, and,

as I disclosed an acquaintance both with the buildings and with the names of their architects, colour came into his cheeks and his eyes flashed. "I am," he said, in one of the most surprising sentences I have ever heard on human lips, "a citizen of no mean City." His toes were out of his boots, and they were bleeding on the highway.

Then, somehow, his whole æsthetic soul poured out. He had only had the most elementary education. But when he was young he had been working on a chapel, and a dissenting minister had fallen into conversation with him about building and had lent him a book. He had forgotten the name of it (I suspected Ruskin), but one loan had led to others. He talked of Shakespeare and of the eminent (he had never seen any of them but seemed almost to persuade himself that he had) who had acted in the plays; he repeated scraps of Keats which he said he had found quoted in old newspapers; he went into something like a paroxysm over Shelley's *Skylark* which I think was the only work of Shelley's which he had encountered; and then he surprised me once more, all innocent that anybody thought of these authors as being on rather different planes, by remarking, in awe-struck tones, on the greatness of Marie Corelli.

I am glad I had self-possession enough to prevent surprise from appearing in my face or qualification in my voice. I could see, as he developed his theme, what it was that had appealed to him in the works of the female Swan of Avon; she had, like all best-sellers of her kind, so great a belief in the nonsense that she wrote, that it was burningly vivid to those who were able to accept it. Wit my Welshman had none, nor scholarship, nor

sense of likelihood, but he was emotional and imaginative and would take colour and passion where he found them; and I was glad indeed, when I had racked my brains for reminiscences of *The Sorrows of Satan*, to find that I could share with him the not quite Miltonic splendours which he innocently supposed that the mysterious and fortunate few, who had the key to the world's libraries, ranked with *Hamlet* and *The Midsummer Night's Dream*. Any knowledge wider than his own I hope I concealed; and he was egoistic enough, certainly unfortunate enough, not to show the slightest curiosity as to my occupation or the source of the acquaintance, which I shared with him, with the mighty creations of Keats and Miss Corelli.

The conversation began to run dry, he to repeat himself, and the sun to sink towards the westward hill; I rose to part, and so did he. He took what I was able to give him with a womanly smile, shook hands and went slowly, his head bowed, towards London, much too much of a gentleman to be effusive in his thanks, and much too reflective to suppose that a day or two's food and shelter would solve his problem. As I mounted the rise and went down that pretty drop to the pine-fringed lake (so like pictures of British Columbia) in front of the "Hut Hotel" at Wisley (where they used to have a collection of albino birds, from swallow to snipe, in the bar but have now removed them for smart tea-room furniture) I was wondering what accident or design could ever set straight such a wasted life as his.

I could not see him, in whatever industrial recovery, fitting in (had he ever really fitted?) with the modern machine; he would have dreamed on a scaffolding,

dropped his trowel through the air, been sacked by the foreman for mooning, done his work badly or not at all because his heart and mind were in Paradise, Utopia, Elsinore, Auburn, Betelgeuse and all the other far kingdoms of dream whose names he did not know but whose qualities were of the substance of his daily life. Vision had probably been his only vice; but it was not possible to think of him working as one of a gang or even doing a solitary job competently. I could just imagine him in the affectionate and humorous care of a mediæval monastery which was able to view indulgently the ineffective efforts of lay-brother Llewellyn in the garden, and willing occasionally to delight his innocent childish eye with bright pictures in an illuminated manuscript.

For there is a variety of types on the road. To the ordinary citizens there are just tramps and "a strange man at the door, mum," but those silent figures who, in ones or twos, at intervals pass along the great main roads are of all kinds as well as of all ages. Some are fresh from employment and will soon get employment; sturdy sailors, for instance, walking because they have no fares—I remember one such who, when helped, said he would like my address (I did not give it) so that later he could send me something "as it might be a parrot." There are the semi-criminals who scowl and mutter; there are the young men genuinely in search of work; there are those who (like many modern parlourmaids) prefer temporary work, with intervals of ease and plenty of change; and there are various kinds of "unemployable."

Some are like my friend who looked like George

THE HONEYSUCKLE AND THE BEE

Meredith; not made to cope with modern regulated life. But there are many, and no reform and no charity is going to change them, who simply don't like it, who prefer a gipsyish existence and are strong and cunning enough to lead it.

We be soldiers three
Lately come from the Low Countrie
With never a penny of mony. . . .

That old song comes from King James's time, and there are plenty of them on the roads still, some with pensions, who contrive to exist without too much hardship, with the help of sturdy begging, rabbit-snaring, pheasant-knocking, vegetable stealing and the workhouses, leading the life of perpetual motion without which they would pine. They know, by virtue of the secret signs they chalk on gate and fence, where they can at least get a kettle of hot water to make their tea, a gift which is seldom unaccompanied by food or money. One such, long ago, kept me entertained half a night, and I wish I could remember all he told me, but I was sleepy and warm.

I was walking late one moonlight night and had gone some miles past Totnes, where I went into a wood to rest. To my astonishment I saw the gleam of a fire through the trees; and, on approaching it, I saw a little old man crouched over it, cooking something. He looked not only harmless but attractive as, hearing the crackle of my feet on twigs, he looked up; he wore a bowler hat, had a beard, and was very wrinkled round the eyes. "Thought you was a keeper," he explained as I came near; though I must say the thought didn't seem to have

alarmed him very much; he probably knew he could charm even a keeper.

He was cooking a red herring on a toasting-fork; he had a second with him, and a hunk of bread, and he asked me to share his meal, which I was glad to do; and as he chattered away about his roving, his merry gnome-like face firelit against a background of dark boughs and moon-silvered glade, I could almost believe I had met Pan in some modern disguise, a Pan who had marched with Roberts to Kandahar and knew every road, wood and common in Southern England, and every stratagem for obtaining creature comforts that any gipsy knew. He was full of jokes and chuckled freely at them, but the food and the fire prevented me from talking with much intelligence. In the end he rolled up in his old coat and I lay down on the other side of the fire and went to sleep instantly. When I woke at dawn, a little chilly, I expected to find him gone; or, rather, did not believe he had ever been there. But there he was, still lively as a cricket. He invited me, a little surprised that I actually had a fixed determination to go in another direction, to join him on his westward way; when we parted I thought: "There, unless he gets ill, which he doesn't look like doing, is a happy man."

None such did I meet on this first day; mostly they were a melancholy brotherhood and a dull. There were not, either on this day or on the others, as many as usual; perhaps, since it was August, as many of them as were willing to do casual work had found employment with the harvest. In any event dark was approaching, and when I reached Ripley, I felt I must push on, and

resisted the temptation to enter either that noble inn "The Talbot" or the little old "Anchor" which went from father to son all the generations from the Armada to just the other day. The seven miles from Ripley to Guildford is dull going, even when not infested by cars coming from behind, and I was not sorry when I got to Guildford. It was a temptation to stop there for the night. But Godalming had been my objective; unlike Mr. Belloc, when he marched on Rome, I had not made a vow not to use "any wheeled thing," nor indeed any vow at all; and though I had had quite enough walking and the pack had become a burden to the flesh, I went on. I caught a train to Godalming. When I got there, I had suddenly got so stiff in the evening air that I hired a taxi to take me the few hundred yards to the hotel.

It was almost ten. I had once been known there and I had no doubt about a bed, as the swarm of Charterhouse parents would not be there in the holidays. The bed arranged, I asked after my old friend the landlord, and was told: "Oh, Mr. ——— he isn't here any longer." So sad it is to leave such gaps between visits. But, happily, cold beef was there, and the bed was there, and very soon, glad that I hadn't hard ground under me or the wind on the heath whistling round my ears, I was snug in the bed. I just managed to turn the light out, and fell into dreamless sleep.

SECOND DAY

IT has long been known that it is one thing to intend to do something and another thing to do it.

Nobody could have been more firmly resolved than I to make an early start next morning, and I had asked for tea at seven. Unfortunately, after I had been waked I fell at once asleep again, and when I got downstairs at half-past nine the landlady, as one knowing the worthlessness of men's promises, remarked: "I thought you said you were going to be out of the house at eight." Still, she didn't seem to mind, and when I had refreshed myself with a kipper I set out with kind farewells.

As I stepped out into that ancient street, every gable-end and Lipton's window of which had been for years familiar to me, I caught sight, at the far end where roads meet, of a small hexagonal plastered building set in the middle of the road. A sudden idea struck me and made me pause on the pavement. "Here am I," I thought, "exploring my native land; I ought to be sight-seeing; I haven't seen a sight yet; why not see one?"

There was that venerable pile, the Godalming museum. For years I had passed it daily, noting the grave letters MUSEUM above the portal; for years I had resolved to investigate it; and never once had I remembered my firm intention and passionate curiosity when I had had time to go in. "I will go in now," I

determined, "even if it means getting a key from the verger's cottage, or whatever it is." With elated heart I strode on past the butcher's, the baker's, the draper's and the ironmonger's, until I reached the hexagon; and, having tried five sides in vain for a door, found one on the sixth. There, as is everywhere too visual on public institutions, was a board explaining that the Museum could only be seen at certain hours on certain days, none of which this particular day was. Baffled and bitter I muttered to myself: "It was bad enough, earlier in the year, to go to Cairo without seeing the Sphinx and to Constantinople without seeing the Golden Horn—but at Stamboul there was rain and mist, and in Egypt I did engage to lecture on literature and was kept busy answering questions by brown majors in red fezzes about D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce. But to visit Godalming once more without seeing the Museum—well, it's disgustingly unfair." I'm quite sure I shall never know what is inside it now. There may be most interesting flint arrow-heads and some of those little serrated things with which early man cut off the ears of his corn. There may be some broken pots. There may be a Cromwellian pike, or some little yellow snakes, going woolly in bottles of spirit; or some dried and tattooed Maori heads, or some Polynesian paddles, or perhaps even the local stocks and ducking-stool, relics of a darker day. "Of course," my thoughts ran perspicaciously on, "the place is pretty small, and there couldn't be any really large things here, like those skeletons of whales at South Kensington, for instance." And then I remembered that even size could sometimes be dealt with by ingenuity.

Long ago I had to turn an ancient printing works into offices, and one of the things I rejoiced in was that, when partitions had gone, there was a top attic for me as big as a chapel, full of light, whitewash and oak supports. I wanted a picture rail and asked a builder and decorator in to discuss it with me.

One morning he came. His name was Mr. Porter. He was huge, fat, red-faced, heavy-moustached, rolling and lumpish in his gait, and his bowler hat was not removed, even when he was in his shirt-sleeves. He was obviously not one of those ruthless business men whose delight it is to plunge *in medias res*, without a little preliminary human intercourse to break the ice. He took out a pipe, sat down and told me that I had a nice little place there, mentioned horse-racing, described his preferences in the way of liquor, and then, by an easy transition through foreign drinks, got to his travels.

He had been, he said, a sailor and a great traveller. There were few parts of the world that he had not seen, though I must admit he gave some, to me, novel pieces of information—as, for example, that the inhabitants of Japan were Mohammedans. Ultimately I said to him: “And I suppose you have been to South America?” “There for years. Know it inside aht,” he replied in his rich Cockney accent. “Have you seen the Amazon?” I asked, thirsting for more enlightenment. “Why, yes; been right up it,” he observed. Then taking his pipe from his mouth and using it as an aid to gesture, he volunteered all I needed in the way of butterflies, alligators, and macaws, until at last we came to boa-constrictors.

Here he became eloquent. Boa-constrictors, he said, were the most remarkable things in creation; for they were faithful beyond human hope or aspiration. They wedded for life; they always went about in pairs; and, if one partner to a boa-constrictor union was shot the other invariably returned to the forest and died of grief. After something approaching a sermon on this supreme example of Nobility among Reptiles, he concluded with an emphatic bang on the table with the flat of his hand and these striking words: "Boa-constrictors: True-Blue, I calls them!"

I assumed, as best I could, an air of serious assent and sympathy; and then, when I thought the theme exhausted, he leant forward earnestly and said: "Would you like a boa-constrictor skin?"

"Rather!" I said, suppressing a lament over the deceased snake's disconsolate mate.

"Well, I've got a very nice one at home," he proceeded; "I like you, mister, and it's yours. I should think," he reflected, turning sideways, "it would just about go on that there long wall. It's a big one; but I *think* it'll do."

Rising, he drew a foot-rule from his waistcoat pocket, rolled to the wall (which was some thirty feet long) and solemnly began to measure it from one end to the other. Coming at last to the near corner he uttered a regretful: "Tut-tut!"

"What's the matter?" I enquired.

"Just won't go," he complained; but then he cheered up, ran his rule for a few feet along the next wall, and said: "It's all right, we can just turn the 'ead a few feet round the corner."

The serpent never arrived; but though never seen it is still to memory dear. Much have I travelled in the realms of gold, some things done and many, alas, left undone, but at least this may be written in my epitaph: "He had his walls measured for a boa-constrictor."

Wistfully I turned away; I will go, I thought, into the "White Hart" for consolation; it's only just opposite, that most ancient inn in the town, curving beautifully at the corner with its simple gables, its oak, its plaster, its overhanging storeys, and above all that lovely old sign, the meek hart lying with his feet underneath and a golden collar round his neck; a hart like that in the Wilton Dypthich in the National Gallery that was the badge of poor, melancholy, perverted, self-pitying Richard II, a hart that might have made friends with St. Hubert himself. I began to cross the road. There was the building. The sign had gone, the ground-floor had been turned into shops, though not one of them was yet adorned with that maddeningly monotonous red-and-gold Woolworth fascia which, in the end, without respect to local architecture, old or new, Tudor or Tartar, will be seen in every great or small town from Lake Erie to Lhassa. "In the end," I say: but the end is not yet. . . .

Depressed, and meditating once more on the imbecilities of our licensing system, I passed along the road, with a garage on my left, and a glimpse of lake through the old cottages and the new cinema site on my right. Once more I was astounded at my country, and at the brewers, and at the Tory Party. It was a Conservative Government which introduced a Licensing Act which

arranged that "redundant" licences should be abolished; that brewers (and why on earth should they own inns and tie them to their own brand of beer, good or bad, paint out the old signs and scrawl the names of their ales—one is called "Shrimp"—across the old fronts?) should surrender an old licence if they wanted a new one, and that benches of "Licensing Justices" (usually and deliberately packed by the most revolting type of whining, nonconformist teetotallers ever conceived of by the author of *Hudibras*) should have the power of deciding what should be shut, what should be open and when—people who regard a harmless village club as rather worse than a brothel, and immeasurably worse than a factory. "The people have the power of altering things," reply the blind worshippers of what is a nominally democratic system. "The people" is but a phrase; "the people" in France or Italy would make short shrift of anyone who attempted to take away their wine in return for giving them votes, i.e., the choice between one caucus nominee and another, each frightened of offending some small minority of cranks whose blinkered minds, on one issue alone, may swing an election one way or another, incidentally and in the mad manner of the Gadarene swine, flinging the country into ruinous war, or disgraceful peace, or the loss of Empire or any other minor matter simply because they cannot bear the idea of not interfering with their neighbours' personal habits. They have not dared to go to the lengths that they and their insane female accomplices went in America. Try England with Prohibition and it will go back to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dr. Johnson and Cobbett as it did in 1914

and during the General Strike, throwing off its back all the England-hating Welsh from Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell to Oliver Cromwell (*né* Williams) and the rest. But take away from the ordinary Englishman only some of his liberties, remove his landmarks only in part, and, good-tempered and patient as he is, he will merely assemble where and when he is allowed to assemble, lament the passing of the "Old Ship" or the "Burlington" at Chiswick (which dated from Agincourt, was frequented by Thames ferrymen and had probably never seen a man drunk in our day), complain that the new pubs are not what the old ones were, that they are more crowded, that managers from the north are not the same as landlords from one's own locality, and that it is abominable to have to drink quickly at ten o'clock, but that "they're all the same, the——politicians"—and they stand it and console themselves with memories of horses and cricket, characters long dead and campaigns long over.

So the "White Hart" has gone. "The 'Saracen's Head' looks down the lane where we shall never drink wine again." That was Chesterton, in *The Flying Inn*, of which Flecker, dying, wrote to me saying that he thought it was the grandest of modern fictions.

From one point of view alone, of course, he was talking; he was regarding, not construction or dramatization, but opinion and power of writing. As I walked, in the heat, along that uninteresting road from Godalming to Milford, redeemed, in one marsh patch, by the pool, near the road to Compton and the relics of G. F. Watts, in which the cows, in summer, stand up to their knees,

placidly in the placid water, I wondered about the urbanization of our recent literature, the loss of religion, of passion, of humour, of historical sense, and of style. I remembered that, when I was young, those of us who were constantly aware of the mystery of life, who cared for continuity, who had no illusions about automatic progress, who did not necessarily believe that to-morrow would be better than to-day or that to-day was necessarily better than yesterday, used to curl our lips at Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. H. G. Wells, the oracles of that time, both of whom, we held, might have been men-of-letters leaving permanent legacies behind them had they not chosen rather to produce cheap-jack systems in journalistic language. What we would have thought could we have foreseen the present day I do not know: a day which lacks even idols with feet of clay, a day of painters mincingly fencing with technique, of musicians who make cacophonous noises or linger tediously in dark forests of echoes, of versifiers who attempt to astound by fanatical or cynical opinions or lack of melody. We shouldn't have believed it could happen; and perhaps it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for the war which blew to pieces a whole generation which had just learnt to reconcile faith with fact, song with reality, and left its children too weak and bewildered to face an age, after all no wickeder than previous ages though its machines may be more terrible than theirs, in which all the easy optimisms from Rousseau's onwards have been thrown into the dust-bin after the philosophies, theologies and ethics that those replaced.

"Lord, how hot is it!" The sweat was pouring down

my brows and leaking over my spectacles; well, it was only a mile or two to Milford, and then I should get into the open country. I passed the "cottage" where Theodore Byard used to live, after he had lost his singing voice in the war (a place with a miniature, but real, park, elms and grass and cattle, which, on so small a scale, I have only seen elsewhere in Lincolnshire), bought a whiting (skinned and tailed, and put in a newspaper wrapping) at a fish-shop, and began the pleasant climb up through Witley Common, which showed no trace of the thousands of Canadians who camped there during the war, but was covered with St. John's Wort, the last top buds of willow-herb, and the grey-lilac fluff of thistles. The view spread and spread as I mounted, and indignation swelled in my breast against the superior persons who imagine that Surrey is all villa-dom, sand, golf-courses, gas-works and Woking; for, south of the Guildford-Dorking line nothing could be more beautiful and varied, and here for miles to right and left of me, were open primitive commons without a house visible.

Nearing the top I blushed. I had killed there—well at any rate not a fox, but a game bird out of season. Once, on a fine August morning, I had been chasing townwards alone in a car when I saw coming towards me on the left a covey of seven partridges. Primitive man arose in me; I thought nothing of licences or Game Laws; instinct merely yelled at me: "Can you hit one of them with the windscreen?" I accelerated to about sixty. It was nicely timed, though I cannot honestly swear that, in the really orthodox way, I picked the outside bird. But at any rate one came down.

I stopped. I didn't know what to do about it. What was the good of a single partridge to a household like mine; how preposterous it would be, since I was to be in town for the night, to "park" it either with a garage-proprietor or a club-porter, either of whom might have looked strangely at me for being in possession of partridges, or even a partridge, before September 1st? The *Deus ex machina* appeared in the shape of a smart, military-looking A.A. Scout with a motor-bicycle and side-car. He saluted. I saluted. "I've knocked down a bird there," I said; "perhaps you might like it." He walked to the spot indicated and brandished his trophy. I saluted; he saluted; then I skimmed on my way. . . .

Just over the top of the hill there was a sandy track to my left; I felt like a change from the high-road so I took it, though I knew where it would lead me. Through the heather I went, drinking in an occasional waft of breeze, avoiding beetles and hole-drilling bees under my feet, enjoying the colour of the gorse, the heath and bell-heather, pausing now and then to look at the wide stretches of moorland and the blue hills far away, once putting up a night-jar which may have had a very late brood, until the path led downwards to a mingling of trees and common and I was passing the Hammer Ponds. Small lakes with that name are not uncommon in Surrey and Sussex; once they were used for the southern, wood-smelting, ironworks; now they are the haunt of trout and wild duck and at peace, and ravens may yet build their nests in the slag-heaps of Staffordshire. To the right again and, after ten minutes, I found

myself near the primitive cricket-ground of Thursley village. It is not so eminent in the annals of Surrey county cricket as the neighbouring ground of Tilford, where Silver Billy Beldham played, and the Cæsars, and where the local publican umpire once gave an opponent "out" with the verdict: "Out, the damned teetotaller!"; but the game is played there with much amusement and not too many appurtenances.

The pavilion was shut; the roller was idle; the vast landscape all around was deserted; the struggle with the wicket and heather and gorse around the out-field was still, evidently, not perfect; though it had made some ground since the days when I used to be afraid of putting the late Reginald Berkeley on there for fear he should kill somebody who was gallantly fighting the losing battle of British agriculture. I sat on a bench and thought of the village. Down the hill and up the hill in the trees to the left was the Dye House, where old Mr. Gough, the squarson, used to live, a man who deserved Jack Russell's epitaph of a great Christian and a great sportsman. When I first knew him he was already eighty and blind, but he could sit in a chair downstairs. When I last saw him he was bedridden, had a shawl over his head, and was consoled by that marvellous modern invention the wireless, over which he sometimes heard the voices of people whom he had met. First and last he was as young, simple, sweet, good and universal as any man I ever knew; and he looked, with his clean, full, Victorian features and white side-whiskers, like one of those steel engravings of deceased and venerable landlords, with reproduced signatures beneath, which still adorn the

walls of country hotels, in proportion as they are farther from London. (There is one of Mr. Garth in a humble ale-house on the Reading road, whose description of the Garth Hunt was passed on to me long ago as: "Fust come the gentlemen from Sandhurst, then the gentlemen from the Staff College, then the gentlemen from Aldershot, then the fox, then the hounds, and, last of all, poor bloody old Garth!") Mr. Gough had been an Oxford rowing man and a county cricketer in his day; and very old and blind had caught salmon on his fishing in Norway, being told where to cast by his wife. He knew all about birds, and was ardent in the shooting of some and the preservation of others; he upheld the local Bench for fining his keeper for shooting a Montagu Harrier, and, of course, paid the fine himself. Much of our conversation concerned such subjects as that, but some of it ran like this:

G: So you knew Sir Alfred Bateman, did you? He was a goodish cricketer. He was secretary to Lord Palmerston. But I suppose Palmerston was before your time?

S: I'm afraid he was.

G: I thought so; enterprising fellow. Did you know W. G.?

S: No, I wish I had; but I once saw him play.

G: Most amusing fellow. I doubt if we shall see anyone like him again! Did you know Alfred Lyttelton?

S: No. Of course I've often seen him and heard him speak; but I only wish I *had* known him.

G: But I am sure you know E. V. Lucas?

S: (On firm ground at last.) Yes, very well.

G: Most excellent fellow, and very kind. He's been down here to see me before now.

And who wouldn't have done so, who had any sense? He knew Squire Osbaldeston's riding weight, very likely saw Sayers and Heenan fight, and seemed the joint descendant of John Nyren, White of Selborne, the Vicar of Wakefield and Colonel Newcome.

Once, and once only, I recalled, as I sat on that bench on that hill-top cricket ground, did I send a man to him with an introduction, and that was shortly before he died—or "passed away," for never was there man to whom that euphemism was more suitable—one felt that even Death could do him no violence or distort that gentle smile which blindness had only made the kinder.

We had talked once, in his study, full of faded old sporting books, and I (who do not smoke cigars and seldom drink sherry) smoking one of his cigars and drinking a glass of his sherry, about that elusive bird, the Dartford Warbler. Somebody had recently told me that it was disappearing from its old nesting-places and could now be only rarely, and with difficulty, stalked by bird-watchers and photographers. I, haunted by the sad ghosts of bittern and bustard, large copper butterfly, all gone, and swallow-tail and fritillary flower, almost gone, had accepted the statement gloomily: after all, an age of limited-liability companies, jerry-builders, and egg-collectors (all of which, or whom, have much the same mentality) would, in time, destroy or deface everything

in nature that one loved. "I hope not," said Mr. Gough, his blind eyes gleaming, his hand rearranging his shawl; "I believe the bird is actually increasing in numbers. There are always several pairs nesting in the garden here, and if you care to go up to Thursley Common and watch for 'em, you're bound to find 'em."

I neither watched nor found, but some time later I had lunch in London with a rare visitant, not a bird but a man, who had come up from Somerset to renew his annual disgust with the Great Metropolis, and do some tiresome family business. He was—I may add, happily, still is—a great ornithologist, and knew the notes, habits, and habitats of all sorts of rare birds which I only knew from pictures or repute. There was hardly a recorded British bird which he had not watched (always excluding things like the Baltimore Oriole which come so seldom that clergymen hardly ever had a chance of shooting them even in the palmy days of the Reverend Mr. Morris) but he said: "The odd thing is that I have never seen a Dartford Warbler; they don't come our way."

What a chance! I have had few real triumphs in my life; very often I feel a fool in the presence of other people's superior knowledge; they say: "My dear fellow, I'm very sorry, but you don't happen to have been there and I have"—and collapse and silence are inevitable. There was, and I feel fortified as it comes to mind, a moment during Armistice week when, though it was but for a moment, the spirit of Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon, and Cardinal Mezzofanti blew through me, and I stood on the top of the world—which, naturally,

recalls Cortes. During the war, with many other rejects and indispensables, I paraded Buckingham Palace gardens at night, guarding with great loyalty, no gallantry, and a considerable risk of pneumonia, His Majesty against whatever dangers might threaten him. "Ours not to reason why," we couldn't have been much protection against bombs, and other dangers seemed nil. Hundreds of men, including Sir J. Smith, K.C.B., and Sir T. Jones, K.C.B. (they were mostly Civil Servants in my squad, and mainly Educational), sergeants and corporals in the force, turned out night after night, year after year, crunching through snow or yearning to the Harvest Moon, relieving each other every two hours or so with challenges, salutes and flashings of torches, the relieved proceeding to the King's Stables for cocoa, biscuits and bridge. Wiser men might perhaps have insisted on our going to sleep instead; but we were proud of our job, and when, late in the war, we heard that another company had arrested a drunken Australian soldier for throwing the hat of another drunken Australian soldier over the Royal and Imperial wall, and actually got him fined a shilling, we felt proud of our Corps (H.Q.C.D.) and very envious of the other company which had bagged the villain. For ourselves we consoled ourselves with Education. Past Grecian portico, grove and lake we tramped; flashed lights when we met, and then for a minute or two, communing strictly against orders, in rain or frosty moonshine listening for the sergeant's grim approach (the sergeant having been either at school or college with most of us), we eagerly exchanged information about Secondary Schools, and

Schools for the Feeble-minded, with explanatory discussions concerning the connection between left-handedness and stammering.

Came a time, after all these ardours, when, at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month (which all sounded like something out of the Book of Revelation, which, indeed, it proved to be), and we were suddenly told that we must parade the streets of the West End for a week—in pairs, of course, for policemen should not, in times of popular turbulence, go about alone.

On Armistice evening I found myself separated from my companion, and endeavoured, with no great ardour and less success, to prevent a large number of lithe and powerful Australians, with attendant maidens, from pulling a captured German gun along the Mall and up St. James's—at the top of which they left it (me in charge), having discovered that Highgate, which they had originally announced as their destination, was a long way off and (in Christina Rossetti's words) "uphill all the way." Little harm had I seen that evening done; a bonfire made under Landseer's Lions, and a number of soldiers and girls dancing, the soldiers because they themselves were not going to be killed and the girls because the soldiers were not going to be killed—and, when I read the Press next morning, I wondered whether the stories about Mafeking night (also the outcome of a poetic and popular relief and release) had been as mendacious as those about the excesses of Armistice night.

However, some other night that week, when the cheering had subsided and the streets were again dark

and solitary at midnight, I was walking along Pall Mall, arm-in-arm with another constable, not a member of my own squad, but one whom I had known long since and lost awhile. He was a dear and simple soul; a barrister, full of the milk of human kindness; I need scarcely add that he did not practise. We had just reached, on our eighth or ninth circuit, the sooty portal of the Reform Club, when a man appeared from nowhere and began gesticulating and emitting strange, inhuman moans. My companion started: he thought it was a lunatic and hurriedly glanced at me as who should say: "Oughtn't we to arrest him?" Happily the deaf-and-dumb finger language came at once to my mind. It was only a lost and dumb Frenchman trying to find his way to Victoria, and by dint of various motions indicating "straight on," "second right," and "bear right," I told him what he wanted to know, and was rewarded by a lifting of the hat, a bow, and as grateful a smile as ever Frenchman gave Englishman.

That was all quite ordinary; but when, under the lamp, I turned to my companion, I saw a face irradiated, as Joan's may have been when she was listening to her "Voices." He had no idea what was up; and, when I explained that I had been talking deaf-and-dumb language to a deaf-and-dumb Frenchman, he was awe-struck. That night he spoke no more; and if he lives to-day he probably thinks that I could readily respond in Amharic or Hittite or the cryptic semaphoring of the tic-tac men to whomsoever might accost me.

That is, of course, harking back; I was talking about Dartford Warblers. The point is, that my ornithologist

friend looked almost as astounded when I said: "Well, if you want to see Dartford Warblers, you've only to come down to me and I can show you any number any day of the week." "Do you really mean that, Squire?" he asked, in that solemn way that truly earnest observers have. "Of course I do," I protested; "come down to-morrow if you like. I'll book you a room at the local pub for two nights and put you on to a man who can tell you exactly where they are to be found." "Right!" he said.

I did. He went to Mr. Gough. He went to the Common. Through his glasses he watched several pairs all day; and I, also with glasses, have been there time and time again and never seen a thing except rabbits and snakes.

That is probably the fate of countless country-lovers who endeavour to make valuable and exciting notes about wild life like White, or characters, customs and seasons like Miss Mitford; the diaries are kept, and turn out to be, in the worst sense of the word, common-place books. Sitting on that Thursley bench and thinking of when I lived within three miles of the place, I remembered how one day I had come back to my house and garden after a day's reading for a publisher; the books perused had included no fewer than three country diaries, written by women, and of so outrageous a banality that even had I recorded my own rural observations they could not have been so devoid of interest. Alone, after dinner, over my fire, I tried, not without sympathy, to envisage the type of person who could be so

eager to keep country diaries and so ignorant as not to know what would have a chance of being published. So I began to write a story; I called it *The New House* and it ran something like this:

“When Elvira Hobbs retired to the country, her husband having just pulled off a coup and bought an old house with five acres on the Surrey-Hampshire borders, her first thought was naturally to get a proper, honest, polite, reasonably cheap, reasonably reasonable, and quite permanent staff of servants. Her next was to get “settled in,” all the furniture nicely placed, everything working properly, contacts with a few neighbours established, the local churches tested, and her husband’s trains more or less regulated. But after all that had been fixed, and a reliable nurse engaged for the children, her third thought was that, now she had achieved the summit of her desires and won a beautiful house and garden in real well-wooded country, she would keep a Nature Diary, with a view, primarily, to her own education and delight, but, secondarily, to publication. When I say “publication,” I am not suggesting that she had illusions about vast and immortal fame: she was too practical to think of such things. But, after all, the world was full, nowadays, of women no cleverer than she, earning good livings by their pens, with novels and miscellaneous literature, so why on earth should not she also, who was intelligent, well-read, and observant, supplement her own income? However humble the increment, it would always come in useful for hats, bulbs, shrubs and, with luck, motor cars.

“She had read ‘White of Selborne’ in her youth: she had

received him as a Prize for an Essay on 'How I would Like to Spend my Holidays,' in which she had openly aspired after cows and cowslips. There, surely, was a good enough model! There was no question but that Nature's Year aroused more interest nowadays than ever; even the popular papers had an inch a day about it. The letters, and still more the Points from Letters, in *The Times*, were even more powerful proof: one could scarcely open that or any other respectable periodical without seeing an article on how to plant ranunculi, or a picture of a kestrel on her nest or a cat suckling a young weasel. Punctual as the arrival of the swallows were the letters about their arrival, and the earliest primrose never missed its chronicler. Moreover, it was perfectly evident that anybody who really took the trouble, with the help of a good pair of field-glasses, to watch birds for an hour a morning, and do a field and hedgerow prow for an hour an afternoon, simply could not fail to record things seldom, if ever, or at least so early, seen in his own, or even in any other neighbourhood. There was plenty of time. She was well staffed; there was a good little shopping town not far away; Roger was in the City every weekday except Saturday, when they would play golf or tennis; and there was no reason why she shouldn't do a book, unique in its way, about the wild life on her own five acres, supplemented by occasional observations drawn from woods and commons immediately adjoining."

Thus far and rather like that, did I get with my introduction; whether or not I made her tell her husband of her intention I do not remember. If I was in a cruel,

cynical mood, I must obviously have made her tell him, and make him so rude about it, that she, poor misunderstood girl, would keep her diary secretly. If I was in a sentimental mood, perhaps I made her begin with secrecy, but only with a view to giving him, understanding lover, a delicious surprise at, say, Christmas. All I remember is that I did get to specimens of the diary.

There, for a time, I was stuck. All I could remember of the real manuscripts I had read was sentences like, "Still raining to-day," and "The postman has just gone by; still no letter from M." I knew if I started inventing a procession of flowers and birds I should not merely slip into forgetfully entering the appearance of the starwort as an autumn phenomenon, but put down all sorts of book-knowledge which these diarists, being truthful observers, do not drag in. So I thought I would, in order most realistically to fill in the quotational gap in my story, make a few daily observations myself, in the few minutes I could spare: that way I would at least get the facts right.

I did. I do so wish I had kept it: it might have comforted many earnest students of Nature. I can only remember the kind of thing it was, and that kind of thing was this kind of thing:

Sept. 8. "How this place swarms with robins," I said yesterday while the gardener forked up bunches of pink-and-white King Edwards and shook them free of clods. A robin perched, immobile and dignified, on a neighbouring potato, presented his profile, not even bothering to notice us. "Yes," replied the gardener,

“but it is them chaffinches that is the greatest pests.”

The point of view: all birds are pests. But this morning, a grey-green morning with the grass pale with the relics of rain, I half agreed with him. The chaffinches here are what the sparrows were in my London garden; so great a multitude that there scarcely seems room for other birds. Without cessation, in all directions, their white feathers conspicuous, they criss-cross the garden, in shoals, in chasing pairs, or singly, the orchard their chief resort. Sparrows here are few. A robin came for the crumbs below my study window, and I watched the gymnastics of a blue-tit hanging upside down picking for insects in an apple-tree near the toolshed. Over the hedge of the paddock two young men and a keeper trudged the stubble for partridges: I heard, later, constant guns but saw no coveys. Three nights ago there were two pheasants in the garden: there are, of course, blackbirds scuttling low through the bushes with replete chuckles as one approaches. After tea John and I found a worm semi-swimming in a semi-puddle. A little water assisted him; he moved like a swimming snake. A great deal did not; he sank and feebly writhed. A creature who can move in either direction indifferently one scarcely pities.

Sept. 9: After breakfast still cold, wet, windy. A starling perched on the top of the fir tree by the N.E. corner of the tennis-court, damp and alone, whilst a chaffinch huddled on a lower branch. The starling cheeped feebly; I could hear the noise plainly only

when I watched his beak opening through the glasses. Finally, he gave several vast quick yawns which opened his thin beak to a right-angle and flew away. Several flights of starlings passed over, and flocks of chaffinches flew briefly in the sky over the tree-tops. There is a rookery somewhere near; as I walked down the oak hedge a vast confused cawing began in the middle distance.

Late at night driving up the lane I saw a stoat slink across the road right under my headlights. It is an odd instinct that makes these things go forward from hedge to hedge, instead of staying where they are and reversing. . . .

Thus, I recall, at any rate at about that daily length, did I begin; but I couldn't stay the distance as my heroine would have done, and I proceeded more in this wise:

Sept. 10: Morning on the lawn wet and grey. Thrush, blackbird, sparrow.

Sept. 14: Sunny morning heavy dew. Saw a blackbird at my crumbs. So far only blackbirds and sparrows and a robin seen there, the last the only one to remain under my eyes not minding.

Sept. 15: On the tennis lawn, first a female dishwasher, then a male; then both together. The male, spick and span, black cowl and bib, white face, striped wings. Walked, then ran, stopped, flirted, walked, ran, took quick turn. Stopped by post and preened himself, nuzzling under wings. Female appeared and he ran all over the lawn two yards

behind her, moving and stopping. Robin on nest, robin on ground, brilliant in sunshine.

Sept. 28: Ten days since I last saw swallows. This morning, damp and grey; many starlings. A cluster in the top of the tall pine. The trees, after two months of frequent rain, still mostly green; but the birches have thinned and browned, and are draped now in fine spare veils of lace.

So I might have proceeded. But one morning, after some more variations on the now familiar starling and robin themes, I saw a nuthatch on the lawn, and, after a moment's delight, I quailed. It wasn't that I shouldn't be able to leave the nuthatch out of my heroine's diary; anyhow she would probably not have known what it was and thought it some robin or chaffinch of unusual colour and shape. But I felt enthusiasm swelling in my bosom. I had never noticed a nuthatch in the garden. Who could say what mightn't turn up next, especially in the spring, if I really began watching properly, and not merely putting in a few minutes a day for facetious purposes? I was faced with a precipice below me. Once let me get that nuthatch entered and I should be well on the slippery slope that leads to the bird-watcher's camera, the botanist's box, and (Heavens!) perhaps a whole year's diary and a book, increasingly mendacious as the need for variety of flora and fauna became more evident, entitled "My Five Acres."

"In that book I wrote no more that day," as Dante would have said. Nor on any other day; I was resolved that, henceforth, should all the bluebreasts and hoopoes

in creation swarm around me, I should never make written note of them. I comforted myself with the reflection that even if I had supplied our Elvira Hobbs with a sufficiency of specimen diary I should never have been able to finish her story off very effectively. For it would have been rather lame, although like the truth, to have had her completed diary rejected by all the publishers' readers in London, including myself, and then either put away in a drawer to be forgotten or else published at the expense of her kind husband. And to have her irate, unkind husband murder her when he found she was becoming "one of those writing women" would have been too sensational for my habitual manner of treatment; though it would have given the magazine illustrator the chance which he usually demands of a prone form, a stern man in a dinner-jacket, and a revolver with smoke still spiring upwards past the napery, the glasses, and the decanter of port.

* * * *

(But I was still on the bench at the Thursley Cricket Ground.) It was almost too hot to move, but very pleasant up there with the commons below, ridge after ridge of hills fading behind them and, in the other direction, the red roofs of the village outskirts. It would have been pleasant to stay there, or to tread again the old street of cottages and climb to churchyard and church and Rapley's farm which has King John walls in it. The church has newly discovered Saxon windows with the original wooden frames in them; it has also a magnificent lot of oak supporting roof and tower. And

in the churchyard by the wall, above the steep declivity, there is a tombstone bearing the inscription "John Freeman, Poet"—for there lies there, within sight of Crooksbury Beacon and in the heart of the country of Cobbett, whom he loved, one of the strongest, most delicate, most profound, and most neglected of poets of our time. But I had set myself a long journey that day; I wanted to get as near Winchester as I could; I should have to stop for lunch; and it was already half-past eleven. So I rose, and marched off to rejoin the main road, which climbs for three miles or so until it reaches Hindhead, the Punchbowl, and the monument of the murdered sailor. What with the sun and the pack on my back, I certainly did not run; but neither did I stop, even at that gap in the hedge on the left, opposite the strange pyramidal hill, from which you, as it were from a balloon, can see to the north Godalming, Guildford and the great promontory of Blackdown, and to the west, far below, what seem to be solid miles of round tree-tops, and then the whole weald, and then what must be the faint hills of Kent eighty miles away. I did pause a second just under the gibbet and looked into the deep bowl to the west, searching in vain for a little stream over which, in 1920, my horse had jumped, and a path leading upward and southward from it. For that horse, when we came to a fork, shied at a goat tethered between two tracks, tried to go one way when I wanted to go another, and hurtled me a complete somersault in the air to fall half stunned on the heather. People came out of the haze to catch him and to carry me. I was next aware of a couch in a refined cottage with two sweet,

if donnish, ladies bending over me with a half-tumblerful of brandy. Restored, I was next aware of their bookshelves above me and caught sight of the labels of the Collected Poems of two tame poets then most fashionable, though now superseded by others dull in another way. More restoratives, I remember, were needed; and then I went my way, remounted on my sorry (I hope sorry) steed, and never could find the cottage again to renew my thanks.

But past the gibbet I went, past the car-parks and garages, past the tea-shop which so oddly calls itself The (or is it Ye?) Punchbowle Inn, and then, since I was thirsty, into the Huts where, as I meditated over my glass of beer, I overheard a conversation which showed that the memories of the Jubilee were still locally warm, and which ended (so far as I was concerned, for I had to go) with the sentence: "Well, what I say is, if the Germans 'ave a man like 'Itler, it's just as well we 'ave a man like King George."

I bought some bread and cheese and an apple—it was after half-past twelve—and thought I would get into the country again before eating my lunch. For Hindhead, in spite of its noble position and the magnificent country all round, is not itself country, but a little blot of urbanization, and I am not sure about Haslemere. As I walked out of it along that straight road that swoops to Liphook, flanked by anomalous conifers, civic paths and even, for some distance, street lamps which might have been imported from Wimbledon, I remembered Hindhead twenty-five years ago.

It was very much then what it is now: a vast brick

hotel over the Punchbowl, a number of villas in their own grounds, a few old cottages, a new church, and an untidy cross-roads now, at week-ends and on Bank Holidays, repellently busy. It suffered from early development; were it started now it would not be so towny, the likely limits of its growth would be limited and its finest prospects might be entirely saved. But somebody about 1890, as it might be a medical friend of Grant Allen, on account of its height, its sand, and its pine-laden breezes, recommended it as a health-resort, and it very soon had its residential hotels and its roads of ugly villas prosperously squatting behind their laurels and their firs.

It had, from the first, a formidably intellectual atmosphere. Dons settled there in retirement, or during their vacations, architects who had known William Morris, cultivated rentiers who had been disciples of Ruskin, Members of Parliament who adored Sir Edward Grey in spite of his Imperialism and detested Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, candidates with polo-collars and red ties who were acquainted with Keir Hardie, authors of textbooks on law and economics who took a correct interest in spinets and the Dolmetsch family, professors of Greek who drank no wine and supporters of the proletariat who had never tasted beer, and were resolved, if they could, to deprive the proletariat of it. I hope my memory does not betray me when I say that most of the villas contained grand pianos, portraits of Wagner and Beethoven, the works of Mill, Morley, Mr. Bernard Shaw and the young Galsworthy, that there were reproductions of the Pre-Raphaelites on the stairs of all the

houses, and that all the gentle grey ladies had been at Girton or Newnham, wore their hair flat and parted in the middle, and were friends of Mrs. Fawcett and Mrs. Garrett Anderson. More water and barley-water were drunk to the acre than in any other parish in England, and the conversation at dinner mildly seethed with such subjects as the Progressive Drama, Garden Cities, Proportional Representation, Co-Partnership and Women's Suffrage.

It was this last matter that first brought me to stay there for any length of time, two or three years before the war—though I had often spent week-ends at Wheel-side with Aneurin Williams from 1910 onwards. A charming elderly couple of reformers had heard that I was an ardent young advocate of the Female Vote, and they wrote and asked me to come to stay for a week and help with a speaking campaign in favour of the Cause. I did not quite know what it involved: all I knew about the Division politically was that the people of Liphook (Lippuk) had a reputation for electoral ferocity unparalleled outside the denser quarters of Liverpool and Belfast. Nor did I feel my qualifications very strong. It was true that I had once marched in a procession, miles long, which went to Hyde Park to listen to Miss Pankhurst and dozens of other orators: and I could remember little of that except two young men with weak beards who, fire in their pale eyes, walked beside me, and the iron sardonic face of Sir Henry Craik as he contemplated the slow cortège from the window of the Athenæum smoking-room. It was true also that, against my convictions and common sense, I had been induced to spend

the night of the 1911 census in a hall on the Kingsway site, the militant pioneers believing that the Government would be baffled and enraged if those who were not allowed to vote refused to be counted; and all I remembered of that was a silly, jolly party, and the image of a celebrated art-critic swarming up an iron pillar in order to drape the rafters with the purple, green and white colours of the W.S.P.U. However, I went, made several speeches a day, mostly out of doors, and have ever since had great sympathy for the promoters of new causes in rural districts.

Certainly no speaker could have had less trouble. As I was not a member of the unenfranchised sex the audiences could scarcely hurl at me what was reputed to be their stock remark: "Go home and mind the baby!" The audiences I got could hardly have been roused to interrupt anybody unless he had first insulted them, and, except in the larger places, the audiences hardly existed. In the daytime the car would stop outside a village inn, and for an hour I would address two gaping yokels and one puzzled woman with all my appeals to reason and sympathy, and statistics about factory legislation in Norway, Finland, Tasmania, or whatever the places were in which women, at that time, already possessed the vote. In the evenings a school, dimly lit by gas and rather draughty, would hear me addressing a chairman, a water-bottle, four well-known supporters and a sprinkling of the dumb curious on the back seats.

As I left Hindhead behind me I reflected grimly that there was at least one experience of my life that was not

likely to be repeated. But then, I felt, in a manner, sad that that should be so: for almost all those devoted and kind, if rarefied, people whom I then knew there are now dead. And two of them, in especial, I shall always regret, the Aneurin Williamses.

I had met them first through their son (they were distantly connected with my wife's family) who was then an undergraduate at King's, and is now well known as an author and bibliographer. The wife, a gracious, tall, and beautiful woman, humorous, widely cultivated, and a good pianist, died before her husband, and he continued alone what had always been a life of pure philanthropy. Somebody once said that all politicians, unless they are mere villains, want to make everybody happy; the trouble is that we all differ as to how to do it. I am sure that Mr. Williams's Utopia would have been a little too tame for me and mine a little too highly coloured and disorderly for him; but I never more revered than in him the workings of a clean and fearless conscience in a crystal vase. His inherited means he regarded as a public trust; in and out of Parliament, in accordance with the general fluxes in the fortunes of Liberals of his quiet and industrious type, he never showed the slightest trace of personal ambition, merely serving the causes of political and economic reconstruction as he saw them. Nobody ever, I am sure, started a Garden City without his taking shares; he was a lifelong "worker for Peace" and belonged to a type of idealistic agnostic family common in his day and rare in ours. I never think of his quiet, serious, round, ruddy, grey-moustached face without remembering his tolerance

THE HONEYSUCKLE AND THE BEE

and kindness to those whose opinions he hated. He was wounded to the heart if one attacked Proportional Representation, and incapable of ever conceiving that there could be reasonable arguments against it: opinions as to what "works" best could never compete with his geometrical library-made theories; yet, unlike many of his kind, he did not think anybody who was opposed to him the devil incarnate, though he perhaps suspected they might not be wholly serious.

All that came back to me as I put distance between myself and the churchyard where I saw him buried years ago. But, sitting under a hedge, and eating my bread and cheese, I remembered a thing which, curiously, I had long forgotten and which has been forgotten by most people. The men at the Hindhead inn had been talking about Abyssinia; and, though it was two months before the Mussolini crisis really arrived, one of them had mentioned, with no air of intimate knowledge or profound respect, "that there League of Nations."

It was at Hindhead that the League of Nations, so described, was invented. In, I think, December 1914, Aneurin Williams wrote in the *Contemporary Review* an article demanding much such a Society of Nations as now exists, and I think that he was the first to use the term "League" for it. He certainly founded the "League of Nations Society" shortly afterwards (I was an original member, though even then I did not believe in the "one nation one vote" theory, Haiti being equal to England—which has partly led to the Abyssinian crash—or to anything but a gradual building up from Western Europe

and, if possible, America). That was before the days of the League of Nations Union, the Society's child; and by the time all the Archbishops and Party leaders had come in, Aneurin Williams had lapsed into comparative obscurity. He was a saint all the same.

* * * * *

"Well," thought I, as I resumed, in the hot afternoon sunshine, the road to Petersfield, "men have died and their dreams have survived them, and though every leaf on every bough seems to whisper 'Abyssinia,' though the world may be rocking to another calamity, though the ground elsewhere may be shaking to the tramp of armed men and the great halls echoing to the thunders of dictators, though half the world dreads and half the world threatens, and the air may rain bombs on us at any moment, the Thirty Years' War was worse in its way, but it didn't make Grotius or Puffendorf lose heart." The sky was blue, the world around was quiet in the sun, willow-herb took light and shade in the woodland clearings, heather trembled on the open hill-sides, the dogs slept on doorsteps in the few villages, the old signs of the "Half Moon" and the "Flying Bull" hung quietly outside the closed inns, and it seemed preposterous, in such surroundings and with my own heart at peace, that the lines of Chesterton should come back to me:

"Earth will grow worse ere men redeem it,
And wars more evil ere all wars cease."

At Petersfield I turned right, along that narrow, hilly,

rustic road to Winchester which is so much quieter and prettier than the main road through Alton. I was but a mile or two past Petersfield, and going slowly up a hill through high thick woods, when I heard a rustle to my left, and there, staring me in the face, poised ready to disappear in a flash, was a thing I had never seen, alive, so close before. It was a fox, his mask lifted straight at me, his glowing amber eyes with their pin-point pupils glaring at me like a mixture of searchlight and gimlet. For several seconds we stared at each other, fear, cunning and courage in his heart, a sudden foolish desire to make friends in mine, to pat him and say "Good fox!" He was there; then, in an instant, he had slunk out of sight to resume his far from vegetarian career. "Blood on his pads," I thought, "and blood on my hands, and that of all our race, not least those members of it who refuse to face facts, and pretend that all the world is the same, and assume that if some of us behave like sheep the rest will stop being wolves." The usual tangle of thoughts followed, as I plodded on noticing neither the landscape nor the passing cars—the heresy of thinking man not a separate thing from animals—was nationalism worth it—how far is climate irresistible—is peace worth mongrelism of race—can it be secured otherwise—how far was the Frenchman of 1789 right when he said that the Prussian was a born soldier and war was to him a national industry—and memories of Germany in 1914, the subtle propaganda about Russia, the vulgarity of Berlin, the ugliness of the Reichstag members, the German professor who lent me £20 to get home with and was repaid in time—August 4th—the four years' dreary massacre—and

Mr. Bonar Law welcoming the first Russian revolution with:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!"

which led me once again to that solitary habit of brooding over the revolutions of history, pre-history and the early slime, Winwood Reade's haunting and horrible *Martyrdom of Man* and the problem of the existence of Evil—which is the end of all such thoughts and leaves a man stranded unless he has the help of a Church without or the finger of God within, and must burden him at times whatever his faith and his charity.

Sharply I pulled myself together: "You're getting tired," I muttered to myself, "that's what's wrong with you. You came here to get away from your thoughts, not to indulge in morbid broodings. Stop this squirrel-in-a-cage business. Use the Free Will in which you so firmly believe and think of something else."

It was all like a voice speaking aloud inside me. It even tried to make jokes. "Think about cricket, for instance! You ought to be able to think of it easily enough, considering that that bowler broke your right forefinger on Saturday; it's bound up and aching, and you won't be able to use or move it for a month. Probably," went on my genial comforter, "it will be crooked and useless for the rest of your life, and you'll always have to do up buttons and laces with your left hand." I *was* getting tired, and no memories of green-sward, stricken fields, luncheon tents, deck-chairs under elms, blazers, champagne cup, summer frocks and

victories off the last ball of the last over would come; had I been able to think of cricket at all it would only have been about dropped catches and wet afternoons in cold pavilions. "The sun is sinking through the trees," the voice went on, "and the sky is untarnished pearl. 'Look on the West,' as Housman says." "He doesn't," I grumbled back, "he says 'Look *not* on the West.' " "Have it your own way," replied the voice, "if you don't want to be cheered up, you needn't."

So I went on not thinking at all, except that blisters seemed to be forming on the balls of my big toes, that my back was aching, that my knees were not so taut as they had been, and that I should like to lie down—though I dared not—for fear of increasing stiffness and a bedless night in the dark. Chin down, mechanically, I went on, until, surprisingly, I came suddenly on the cross-roads and an inn. "A bed at last," I thought; "I've done thirty miles and I've earned it." I went in and asked. They were very kind, but they were full up. I ordered a drink. "Probably," they said, "if you turn left, you'll be able to get a bed at the 'Dog and Pheasant,' a couple of miles on." It was nine o'clock and the light late. Time, and the braggadocio of a townish-looking young man who boasted to his experienced elders of his triumphs with poultry farming and market gardening, drove me rapidly out in the faint hope of a bus.

I asked the pleasant A.A. man about buses, but all he could suggest was that if I walked on some passing driver might offer me a lift. I said good night and doggedly, if slowly, walked on in the fading twilight, a little chilled by weariness, and occasionally counting

my steps up to a hundred in order to pass the time. Darker and darker it grew, and nothing passed but fast cars going the wrong way, but it seemed more like an hour than half an hour before I found myself in front of the "Dog."

Yellow light streamed from the open doorway, and a cheerful noise of pre-closing hour's conversation. "Thank God I may get a bed at last," I thought, stepped through the door, and, before I had got any farther saw advancing towards me, tankard in hand, the beaming round face and burly figure of my old friend Aubrey Robinson. Out shot his free hand: "What will you have?" he demanded, heartily.

For a moment I forgot thirst, bed, fatigue, knapsack and blisters in utter astonishment at his sang-froid. I knew he lived in Hampshire now, but not where; he could not have had the slightest notion that I was within a hundred miles; we had not met since the last Newbury Races; it flashed through my mind that this was the sort of man who, without preliminary curiosity, would have addressed a returning Rip Van Winkle with "I say, old fellow, I can tell you where you can get your beard trimmed."

"What will you have?" he asked, with the air of a man whose next proceedings would be to introduce me to his friends and suggest a game of darts. "An armchair, if there is one," I groaned. "Oh, that's easy," he assured me, and pushed me through to a little back-parlour, where I discarded my gear and fell back into aching comfort. "I say, Fred!" he called; and got what we wanted. "Where are you sleeping to-night?" was his next enquiry.

"Here, if I can. I'm walking."

"So it seems. Why not have a bed at my place?"

"I'd love one if it isn't too far to walk."

"Just round the corner, and I've got the car here. I can only offer you some cold bacon."

"The two things I want," I said, glowing with gratitude, "apart from a deep chair and a bed."

"Indeed yes," thought I, as I crept into a car whose antiquity even darkness could not conceal. I was rather cold but very stiff, and warmth would soon unbend me. As for cold bacon, call it that or pickled pork, what better food is there at any time of the day, preferably with potatoes, fried or boiled, and tomatoes, with English Cheddar, butter, bread and more tomatoes to follow? I have not eaten rats, mice, snakes, or elephant's feet or any of the fauna of Africa; the humble best I can do in the exotic way is horse-meat, sea-weed, sharks' fins, bird's-nest soup, frogs' legs (eaten on the *Olympic* after she had called at Cherbourg for passengers, mails, frogs and snails), reindeer (eaten at Upsala and in Helsingfors), terrapin soup and raw canvasback duck (eaten in Baltimore), tinned Canadian salmon (eaten in Samaria), and hot roast kangaroo, with pineapple chunks and their syrup, which, in 1910, made me very sick at a small Rotterdam hotel. Nightingales' tongues in aspic; peacocks, swans and bustards went out before my time. Of things not so exotic, but mostly expensive, there are many familiar and, at moments of delicacy or connoisseurship, excellent: as truffles, *pâté-en-croûte*, caviare, asparagus, stuffed olives, sole *vol-au-vent*, sole *délice*, sole (or, for that matter, fresh mackerel or

herring) *bonne-femme*, haddock *Sovrani*, cold grouse, cold partridge, cold quails, cheese soufflé, mushrooms, and ten thousand other viands. But also there are stuffed roast veal, porterhouse steaks, boiled salt beef with dumplings, carrots, mashed turnips and potatoes in their jackets and white sauce, duck and green peas, goose. . . . I came suddenly out of this dizzy reverie about food, induced by heat and hunger, as the car jolted through a gateless gateway, up a rutted drive and came to a stop in front of a creeper-draped Elizabethan porch, the door in which opened at once. "Here we are," said Aubrey, "get out if you can manage it."

I got out amid the barking of many dogs from barns in the background. My things were taken from me. I was led upstairs and shown my bedroom and the bathroom. I came down into the sitting-room, was dumped into a deep armchair, and was informed that Sally would have supper ready in ten minutes. Aubrey went off to help with the preparations while I lit a cigarette and looked around me.

All his old treasures were there; the worn comfortable furniture, the prints of the ancient race-horses being proudly exhibited by dukes, marquises, trainers and jockeys long dead, and the strange litter of books. The desk behind my left shoulder was piled with papers and in a little table book-rack I could see the *Oxford Book of English Verse* and diverse works on food and gardening, and two deep in the shelves was the odd assortment he had had in his other house of Shelley and Pierce Egan, Verlaine and *The Sporting Magazine*, Baudelaire, Coventry Patmore, Beckford, Pitcher, Nimrod, the Druid and

reflection of yellow light on frames and glass, thought of Lady Macbeth's candle, and then blew the light out. Momentarily I was aware that the moon was up, and that shadows of diamond panes and leaves from the casement were silhouetted on the wall to my left. Then a great billow of sleep came over me and I did not even dream.

THIRD DAY

I WAS half-awake, and blinking to the brilliant sunshine, puzzled by the unfamiliar room and beginning to reconstruct the evening before with a view to discovering where I was, when there was a knock at the door and full enlightenment came. It was Aubrey, cheerful and well-soaped, wearing a very florid red silk dressing-gown and carrying an equally florid blue one which he dropped on the bed. I said I would like some tea, and he called down the stairs: "Sally, our visitor would like some tea," and at once and imperturbably resumed where he had left off with: "Well, now, of course you're staying over to-night, and will run over and see George this afternoon."

"I really *can't*, Aubrey," I said.

"Of course you will," he repeated, with friendly contempt. "Would you like breakfast in bed?"

"Certainly not," I replied hardily. "I'll stuff some paper in my shoes, soap my blisters, and get on to Winchester as soon as I've had breakfast. You don't seem to understand I'm on a walking tour."

"Well, you can walk to-morrow, can't you!" he ejaculated. "Would you like some eggs or will you carry on with the cold bacon?"

"Cold bacon for me."

"Well, sing out when you're nearly ready and we'll make the coffee."

When I got down he was ready with another opening.

"You'd much better take a day off to-day," he said. "We can see George this afternoon, and it's just occurred to me you'd be sure to like to run over and see the 'Tichborne Arms' this morning."

"Let's talk about it after breakfast," I said, as I helped myself to coffee, quietly resolved on no account whatever to change my decision to cover a decent distance that day. The last temptation, though, I must admit, was a real one, for the little inn at Tichborne meant a great deal to me.

Suppose, about 1960, a man now in his twenties were suddenly to encounter, in a remote Kentish huddle of cottages, with an ancient church and an ancestral park, a shy inn, thatched, dormered, covered with roses, benches in a little garden in front of it, a great heraldic signboard hanging over it, and written on the lintel: "Frank Woolley, licensed to sell wines, spirits, beer and tobacco." His impression would be much the same as that which was made upon men of my generation in the post-war years when they visited the exquisite and secluded village of Tichborne and found Maurice Read in charge both of the inn and of the cricket ground. One of the most polished bats—he was also a wily bowler—who ever played for Surrey, he played for England both here and in Australia, but retired early, in the 'nineties, when Sir Joseph Tichborne offered him the job of looking after his private ground. There, for more than thirty years, he was a kind of secondary king of the place and, after his old master died, a perfect host both on and off the field. The inn was a minor interest,

though, in his quiet way, he loved seeing natives and visitors foregathering in bar and courtyard for beer and laughter in the evenings after matches were over. The ground was his passion; in the early morning and at twilight, whenever he could, he would steal up to it looking for the least blemish in wicket and outfield. And, to the last, he himself played in his peaceful corner, against local sides and men on holiday, a straight bat to the end and, in his late sixties, a beautiful judge of a run and a wary fielder.

On cricketing days and others I had often talked to him, in company and alone. The last time I had seen him was in Winchester Hospital, a few days before he died of a wasting internal disease. There he lay, tired, faintly smiling, uncomplaining. His face—he had a high head, candid blue eyes, a thin aquiline nose, hollow cheeks, fair-grey drooping moustache and brief cropped side-whiskers—a more humane version of the late Lord Lansdowne—was like parchment stretched over bone, and his hands, all knuckles and cords, drooped weakly over the coverlet. An English side was in Australia; he knew every man's form and abilities. "Incidents" had occurred; he remembered tours of forty years before, and said that they would always occur because of differences in national character.

A nurse brought some minced chicken. He ate a little, then lay back again. He looked the great gentleman he was; there was still in his face the old beauty, modesty, intelligence, dignity, nothing of collapse except extreme leanness; and smiles came into his eyes (for he had never been one, even in health, to laugh aloud except very

quietly) as he recalled games long over, and the lusty figures of the past—the bravery of Richardson, the pace of Spofforth, the cunning of “W.G.,” and the sheer impudence of E. M. Grace, “the Coroner” who, he said, used to insist on a waiter bringing out a large whisky-and-soda as he reached each fifty, and who had once marched out on the field and stayed there in a county match when his name, because he was out of form, had been left out of the XI. We parted at last; he was still talking of “next season” and playing again. . . .

Breakfast over, we went outside to see the dogs, fowls, geese, ducks, turkeys, beans, vegetable marrows, and jungle-surrounded barns, and I picked up the thread again. “I must go on, Aubrey,” I protested. “I’d like to see Tichborne again; but I’d rather do so when there’s a match on, and as for George, you can give him my regards. I shan’t go fast to-day and I’m still pretty stiff, so I’d better start at once.”

“Well, look here,” he offered, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. You’ll hardly get to Stockbridge to-day, let alone Salisbury. So you’d better let me run you into Winchester, and you can go on from there. It’s quite all right; I’ve got some shopping to do.”

The flesh was weak, and the spirit was only too willing. I gave way, collected my traps, said good-bye to Sally and the nearest of the hounds, and we rattled off. From the heights above Winchester, near that strange great hollow, the Punchbowl, which has lynchet-like ridges running round the top, and a floor which might have once been the floor of a lake, we halted. We thought we

could see the sea, and the far hills wrapped in heat-haze were the hills of the Isle of Wight. We went on, ran down the narrow steep hill, and were presently in that wide piazza which has the giant be-sworded statue of King Alfred at the hither end, and, dominating it on the south, that Town Hall which is a disgrace to a Cathedral City. Aubrey parked his car, induced me to "wait a moment," while he bought some tobacco, cigarettes, beer and fish, and then came out, started the car again and said: "We will now go to a little pub I know, just on the edge of the town."

"What on earth for?" I asked, adjusting my knapsack.

"Jump in," he said, "and I'll tell you. You see," he continued, as the car started off, "the beer's good there, and the buses to Stockbridge stop just outside."

"What in the world are the Stockbridge buses to me?"

"We'll talk about that when we get there. You'll like this little place. A very amusing crowd of people there."

I resigned myself. After all, I hadn't taken a holiday in order to argue with my friends, and it was once more getting too hot and dazzling bright to argue with anybody. A few serpentine turns and we were in a restful-looking inn at the foot of a semi-rural hill.

"Good morning, good morning, good morning," called Aubrey to the landlord and various men who waved back to him; and then to me: "What will you have?" I was introduced to the landlord, who, in the intervals of serving and wiping glasses, produced several pithy apophthegms about Muzzle-ini, Mr. Lloyd George and the Life of Earl Haig. Aubrey, with an apology, had marched over to a far corner to talk to two horsy-looking

friends. Left alone I fell into converse with two other men, weather-beaten, middle-aged, clean-shaven and clad in plus-fours; had I been thinking in the parlance of Mr. Wodehouse's Mr. Mulliner, I should have described them as Two Double Scotches. "So you're walking, are you?" said one, who must have heard Aubrey's introduction of me to the jockey-like little landlord. "I went a long walk once."

"When was that?" asked the other, sceptically.

"During the war," was the answer, "when I was convalescing. I walked all one bloody hot afternoon just like to-day's going to be. And when I got to Malvern about six, half-dead, covered with dust, throat like an oven and tongue hanging out, I knocked at a pub door and asked them if they were open yet? D'you know what they said?"

"No," we both remarked.

"My God, I shall never forget it. They said they'd been open all the bloody day. My God, I *was* fed up. They didn't have those regulations down there until long after the other parts of England."

"They didn't in Somerset either," said his friend.

"Didn't they?"

"No, I was down there on leave. I remember I climbed Keynsham Church tower."

"Did you?"

"Yes; you can see Weston-super-Mare from there."

"What the hell would anybody want to do that for?"

To that there was no answer. The check seemed to remind them that they had business elsewhere, and with

a last swallow and a "Good-bye, Walter," to the landlord, they hurried out.

I was alone again; but when Aubrey, deeply engaged, glanced in my direction to see if I were happy, I made a sign of reassurance, for I was already overhearing a conversation between two elderly, heavily moustached men, in working clothes, and one veteran in shabby mufti, who were clasping glass pints on a bench against the wall on my other side.

They appeared to be talking about horses.

"Give me Park 'Ero," said one.

"'E's all right," agreed the second, "but Solidity'll beat 'im any time."

"Excelsior's every bit as good as Solidity. 'E's a good 'un, 'e be," wheezed the old man, "but I puts my money on Ailsa Craig."

"Ay," said the other two in unison, "that be a good 'un, that be."

I was puzzled. It wasn't so much that I didn't know the names of any of the horses; Ailsa Craig sounded very much like the name of a Grand National winner—though I couldn't recollect the year and, anyhow, the flat-racing season was still on. There might be a local meeting, and I might not know the names of any horses running at local meetings, such as those of Newton Abbot, Wincanton, or almost any cathedral town. What beat me is that there should be a local meeting on and that Aubrey should not have tried to persuade, and indeed have persuaded, me to go to it.

"Newnham Park," I heard in a husky voice; then, "What about White Lisbon?"

They all sounded likely nags to me; though, like the ancient, I couldn't help fancying Ailsa Craig, a winner's name if ever there was one. "Just as Colombo's was," I reflected, then remembered that Colombo didn't win.

I was just wondering whether to sound the landlord about a flutter, when Aubrey, shouting for another drink, rejoined me. "Sorry, old man," he said, "I've been trying to sell old Bob a pig."

"Don't mention it," I replied, "I've been having a grand time. I say, is there any racing on to-day?"

"Not that I know of," was his answer, "unless there's something at Catterick, or Carlisle, or Ayr, or one of those damned places up north that I never touch."

"Well," I said, putting my hand on his sleeve, "just listen to those men over there."

We listened. Another man, tall, lean, clad in cap, keeper's coat, and leggings, had joined them and was being temporarily called in as arbiter. "What do you think, Sid?" they asked him.

"If you want to know what I think," he replied, with a shrug and lifted eyebrows, "I don't think there's anything to beat Giant Lemon Rocker . . ." (I shrank at this unorthodox name for horse, mare, colt, filly or gelding.) "James's Keepings, or Sutton's Improved Reading."

I couldn't adjust. I turned to Aubrey and stammered: "What on earth are they talking about?"

Aubrey's face had gone red. His tankard flourished in the air. His eyes closed, his mouth opened, and chuckles worthy of Sir Toby Belch rose from the depths

of his throat. With bursts of chuckling coming between every word, he managed to say: "Dear old soul, they're not talking about horses, they're talking about onions." He summoned all within sight to a drink to my health. I was greatly embarrassed, but I hope that I carried it off.

I had had enough of this place, and wanted to get on. "What about that bus you mentioned?" I enquired.

"There isn't another bus for two hours, and if you wait for that you'll have to spend the last hour waiting outside on the gravel," replied Aubrey, commiseratingly.

"But you said there was a bus!" I reminded him, angrily.

"So there was," he said. "Didn't you hear it come up and go away half an hour ago? Didn't you see those two chaps in plus-fours rush out to catch it? As usual, I suppose, you were deep in conversation."

It was one o'clock. My whole programme for the day had been spoilt. There, on the floor in the corner, was my knapsack, but there, outside, was the car. "Look here," he said, "you'd much better come back to the farm to lunch. I've got some fish on board, and, if you really must, you can walk back to Winchester in the cool of the evening and sleep at the 'God Begot.'"

Through my head there ran some rhymes which I had written long ago and never printed, and which had a refrain beginning "Sheep as a Lamb, Sheep as a Lamb." "No more friends on this journey, I sincerely hope," was my next reflection; but aloud I said: "All right, Aubrey, it won't make much difference, so long as

I get to Devon on the day I said I would. And it is hot, I admit, and I am still stiff."

A complacency of foreknowledge shone across his face. "Of course," he cooed, "I knew you'd come back. It's all rot you were talking about having to go on. I knew it was all the time; we can get back for lunch at three. The worst of you men who've got tangled up in engagements . . ."

But by this time we were out and mounting the car, my knapsack going into the dickey with the beer and the fish. "There in no time," said Aubrey resolutely; we whizzed off, skimmed round corners, mounted hills, skirted woods, and quite definitely were.

Sally was on the doorstep as soon as the car reached it, while the dogs yelped and bayed all round. "Mr. Aubrey said you'd be sure to be back, sir," she said, welcoming me in the most humiliating manner.

I very nearly went away, sulkily. In other words, I didn't.

This time it was fillet of sole, fried potatoes, and Double Gloucester; then coffee and brandy in the sitting-room. "I say," I said suddenly, "I really must get back into Winchester to-night. Do you mind if I go and lie down just for two hours; I'm still pretty tired."

"Certainly not," said Aubrey. "I'll wake you at six, and then we can go over and see George."

I mumbled: "Yes, splendid," though there was nobody in the world whom I wanted to see less than George, who, anyhow, I reflected with bitterness, was only a fat facetious farmer, and I went upstairs, took off coat and shoes, put the eiderdown over me, and relapsed into a dream of racing between horses with

onions' heads and glaring lobsters' eyes on stalks, all heading for my hapless self.

When I awoke, the full daylight was still streaming through the windows. I rose, rinsed my face, and descended the stairs. Aubrey was deep in an armchair with a bottle of beer beside him, several books open on a table at his other hand, and an exercise book on his knee. His head was down and he was industriously writing. I felt like retiring, he looked so busy; but, hearing me, he flung everything down, exclaimed: "Only filling up the time with a few more notes on my *History of the Thoroughbred*," and added: "Well, if you're ready; supper isn't till eight and I hope you won't mind cold bacon again, and we might as well go and look them up at the 'Hare and Hounds.' "

I forgot, at any rate I did not mind forgetting, my resolution to proceed to Winchester that night. "But," I rejoined, "I thought you said we were going over to see George?"

"What, didn't I tell you?" he asked, surprised. "I thought I'd told you George has been off all day buying beasts near Basingstoke, and he won't be back till late."

There was no point in arguing, though such deceitfulness deserved rebuke. Once more the car was started and, o'er moor and torrent, we reached the "Hare and Hounds." As we entered it loud voices, very late in the day, were discussing Larwood, Jardine, and the leg-theory; to my surprise, in the middle of the group, I saw the Gargantuan form of George, complete with his old school tie, vast expanse of yellow suit, and little eyes sunk in his pig-like face.

"Well, well, well !" gurgled George, extending a hand to each of us.

"Thought you were up around Basingstoke, George," said Aubrey.

"Beasts too dear, everything's too dear," said George. "I just came away. What'll you have?"

A confidential sermon on farming followed, from which I could only deduce that everything was at once too dear and too cheap; but we soon got back to cricket, and harmony with "dear old Maurice Read." Two hours flashed by in a general din, when Aubrey, who had been doing a circuit of the bar, came up cheerfully and said: "Look here, if you aren't hungry, I am." I was, and said so.

Shadows gathering, we drove back once more to the cold bacon. Something had changed Aubrey's mood. The silence in which he ate his meal was not the silence of appetite but the silence of worry. I felt uneasy; his brows were knitted, he ate, as it were, vindictively, and he looked as though he had something on his mind. When we settled down in the sitting-room he was uncharacteristically offhand when Sally brought in the coffee, saying: "Just put it down there and bring us in a bottle of claret and two glasses." "Good night, sir," said Sally, with unusual reserve, as she set the last things down. "Good night," he replied, abstractedly, with his chin upon his hands and his eyes staring forwards and downwards. In the lamplight the sporting prints looked down on him compassionately; the old furniture was undisturbed.

I watched him with an unaccustomed scrutiny. That

usually jolly and care-free face had become suddenly sombre and brooding.

He threw away a cigarette impatiently, and lit another. Then he turned to me and, speaking in a slow incisive voice, said: "Do you suppose that any of those chaps we saw to-day ever *think?*"

"I don't know," I replied. "I expect they do, when they're in trouble or in the silent watches of the night. I expect that everybody does who isn't a mere animal. You can't very well suffer without wondering why, or meditate alone without wondering where you came from."

"I've been worrying about it lately," said he, whom I had always supposed to concern himself only about cricket, beer, the crops, the garden, racing, and the utterly damnable eating-up of England by speculative builders, taxation and the urban mind.

"About what?" I asked.

"About Truth," said he, "about what it's all about."

There flashed through my mind an old *Punch* dialogue: "What abart it?"—"Well, what abart what?"—"Well, what abart what you said abart me?" I checked myself, on grounds of tact and consideration, from repeating it, as flippancy, at the moment, would have been no balm for him. Nor did I remind him of the happiness of his diurnal pursuits; for he was aware of that, and trying, if not to escape from it, to relate it in some manner to the unhappiness of others, to the Universe, and to the ultimate mysteries of Death, Evil, and that wavering thing, the Categorical Imperative, which is (or was) a Prussian name for Duty and Conscience. Had it been

earlier in the day and he in another mood I might have fetched his Bible (probably kept between Pitcher and Mrs. Earle) and read to him from the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. But I was his guest, I had to consort to his mood, I had (if possible) to cheer him up, I remembered that both St. Augustine and Cardinal Newman had had their doubts and guessed that St. Ignatius had had his, and I felt that, as his faith was waning with the night, the best thing I could do would be to sympathize with his scepticism and put the jolliest face possible upon that state of mind which was habitual to Pyrrho and the late Lord Balfour, and, probably, to the late Pontius Pilate. "Did I ever," I asked him, lighting a preparatory cigarette, pouring out another glass, and wishing there were a log to kick into a blazing fire, "tell you about that night I spent in Venice?"

"I suppose you mean you talked to a Catholic priest?" he replied, with the sullenness of the man who has been on the verge of Catholicism all his life.

"Nothing of the sort," I remarked soothingly, "it's only that I had a dream and I don't know whether it was a dream."

"That sounds pretty good nonsense," he retorted, already resuming some semblance of his normal hearty, combative self.

"Not at all," I proceeded. "Did you ever hear of Chuang Tzu?" There was a long pause.

"No; I suppose he was a Chinese philosopher?"

"An easy guess, and quite correct. He lived some thousands of years ago. It is reported of him that when

the Emperor (it was about the time when the earliest fine pots were made, which fetch so much in Boston) sent emissaries to ask him to be viceroy of a province, he replied that he was too busy watching a frog dive into a lily-pond. But there is also extant a story about him saying that he had dreamt he was a butterfly and that, for the rest of his life, he would not know whether he was a man dreaming that he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming that he was a man."

"Tight, I expect," said Aubrey surprisingly, with his usual gurgling laugh.

"Not at all," said I; "he knew a lot more about it than most of our modern philosophers, let alone all the business men to whom you object. But am I to go on with my story?"

"Carry on," said Aubrey, encouragingly, and emerging so far from his gloom as to fill his glass to the brim, "what was it?"

"You seem to have forgotten rather rapidly. But it doesn't matter: I will go on. I will tell you what happened to me in Venice."

"Leave out anything you don't want to tell," he interrupted, with some coarseness. I was tempted to reply rather hotly, but remembered that I was playing the game of distracting him, and merely remarked: "Now, are you going to listen?"

"Of course I am, old boy," he responded. "Carry on."

"Well," I went on mollified, "you can hear about my meeting with Truth, which I don't know whether it was a dream or not." Aubrey murmured something about grammar, but I went on, taking no notice.

"It had been," I said, adopting that artificial crooning voice which is usual with English people who think they are using poetical words, "a perfect evening after a long train journey. Dinner over the Lagoon, with the Maritime Customs House and Santa Maria della Salute, ornate but dignified, peacefully reposing across the end of the Grand Canal; an hour on the balcony, watching the pearl-grey of the far waters and sea-green of the near ones flushed red by the sunset and then dwindling into darkness, crossed by rippling plates of gold; then good night, early to bed, comfortable sheets, and a pink-shaded light on the little bedside table.

"I can't go to sleep yet," I thought. "Venice is much too lovely and I want to lie and think about it."

"Quite right," observed Aubrey, sipping his claret with his eyes closed, "but, I say, old boy, are you reading this?"

"No, I'm not! You can't expect me to talk about Venice in your Kempton Park slang, can you?"

"I didn't mean any offence. But there are rather a lot of adjectives, aren't there?"

"Venice is built of adjectives; am I to go on, or am I not?"

"Why, certainly, I am getting interested."

"Well, prove it by keeping your mouth shut. Now listen! Besides that, the motor-boats were still roaring up and down the waters. Not quite so good as the Bucentaur from which a thousand years of Doges married the Republic with golden rings. What should I read, I thought? I was in pyjamas and much too comfortable to dress again and wander downstairs to

search the hotel library for a Wodehouse I had often read before or a Tauchnitz Elinor Glyn. I had a small attaché case with me as well as my large trunk; I remembered cramming papers into it as I left the train. So I reluctantly got out of bed, fetched the case, detached (with difficulty) the lock, undid two straps and unveiled the contents.

"There were two evening papers, bought at twelve o'clock on Tuesday morning, dated at five o'clock on Tuesday evening and definitely the worse for wear on Wednesday night. There was an *Illustrated London News*. I had read it through: coloured pictures of the latest-discovered head-dresses of Queens of Ur and the latest-found pots from Peru. Odds and ends also there were; but, at the bottom of the pile, there was *Truth*."

"Good God, Jack!" exclaimed Aubrey. "You don't mean you still take up *Truth*?"

"I don't see how that can concern you," I said. "I remember it longer than you can! My mother must have introduced it to my infant notice at about the same time as she tried to make me understand whist, solo-whist, euchre, nap, the poetry of Longfellow and Scott, and Racine. Being young (and I expect you to remember this, too), I did not relate the cover to the contents. On the cover was the figure which you can still see there; inside, after the accounts of royal movements, Admiralty improvements, Indian army promotions and questions about the law, there were paragraphs (and occasionally leaders) about crooked company-promoters, money-lenders, reverend bogus-charity swindlers, which fascinated me then and fascinate me still. But I never

troubled, as a child, to relate the cover of *Truth* to truth itself. I was content to think of her as a goddess, virtuous and impeccable.

"So, in my room at Venice, with night outside and that august circle of pink palaces ringed round the many-islanded lagoon, I picked up *Truth*. I did not look once more at the inside—I simply looked at the cover."

"I will say that about *Truth*," remarked my conservative friend, "that they do stick to their old cover instead of always changing it like all those other damned papers."

"You are quite right. And there my attention dwelt. Truth was represented (in the tradition of Florence Nightingale but with much less than her ferocity) as a yearning, aspiring feminist. She had a severe, though decent, face; her hair was parted in the middle; her dress was Greek (or rather, Grecian) and fell in respectable folds over her bosom and limbs. Over her head, with her left hand, she held a Roman lamp. Serene, austere, severe. I looked at her from my pillow and I thought: 'Can this figure, which I have known from my childhood, and which has cast such a spell over me, really be Truth?' In my youth I thought she was; and I didn't try to reconcile her to the money-lenders. Truth was one thing and this life was another; the Synthesis need not be made. In my bed, in Venice, trying to be honest I looked at her again."

"Now you know, Aubrey, I hate to use words like 'school-marm.' It simply isn't English. But that woman! One can just hear her, as the head-mistress of the Athens High School, saying to her pupils: 'Well, of course, girls,

hockey isn't everything, but I do hope we shall beat the Old Palladians on Saturday, and I expect every girl in the school to turn up and cheer. In spite of what all the moderns say, there is really something about loyalty. I think I hear Diana in the back row, tittering; as I do not believe in punishment I shall inflict no punishment, but I hope Diana will remember this rebuke.' Contemplating that figure I heard all this and more. My thoughts drifted far away from the sage-green covers of *Truth*. I don't know where I went—I was thinking only about truth, and the stars, and God.

"Now a strange thing happened, Aubrey. I suddenly sat up: in the bed where I had been before. There was a kind of whirling in the air. The lights went round, and then they settled down. Rather puzzled, I re-settled myself as the disturbance subsided and my glance fell on the cover of *Truth*, still in my hand. Then I looked across at a dim little picture on the opposite wall which I suspected to be 'A Village in Surrey.' Vaguely from somewhere on the right I heard a tremolo voice, like a voice in dreams. It said: 'Oh yes! and——?'

"I started, leapt, turned. 'Oh my God—what's that?' came instantaneously through my mind, with thoughts of demons, ghosts, and fetches. As I turned the voice said mockingly: 'Sorry you've been troubled!' Simultaneously I was troubled even more. For there stood between me and the door a tall slim young woman, of perhaps twenty-eight, as cool as a cucumber and with every reason for her coolness. Her hair was red—neither purple-red nor yellow-red—but even at that I could not have taken my oath as to whether it was dyed or

not. She had pointed cheeks, a pointed chin, a long neck, small pointed breasts, pointed shoulders, pointed hips; her eyebrows were raised, her eyelids lowered, her nostrils tinged with disdain. Her chin was strongly-cloven, her eyes cold and hard. 'I'm glad you've noticed me at last,' she said. 'You see, I'm Truth.' "

"I believe I've met that girl in Fitzroy Street," said Aubrey reminiscently; "let me fill your glass. Carry on; I want to know what's going to happen next. I know what would happen if it were Anatole France all right."

"Well, it isn't!" I said, "and so do I. All right. Yes, that will do. Well, I suppose I shall have to remind you again that I was in a room in Venice and had been tucking myself into bed and I was going to sleep in two minutes and it was infernally unfair that an unexpected visitor should consider herself expected. 'Look here,' I said, 'I don't want to be rude to a lady—but what in the devil are you doing here?'"

"Against the remoter wall she displayed herself in all her downy and disdainful glory, and then she came to the side of the bed and glowered over me. That red head leant over me; those eyes leered; those flexible lips conjured me; and then Truth leapt into the bed."

Aubrey started to speak.

"Look here," I said, half rising, "if you interrupt again I shall go upstairs——"

"I'm so sorry," he replied apologetically, "I swear I won't say another word until you've finished. Just carry on." Mollified, I proceeded.

"It was an extremely uncomfortable situation. But

one must accommodate oneself to everything that turns up, and I tried to accommodate myself to this. 'I say,' I said, 'I do hope you're warm enough; wouldn't you like—er—a rug——?' She wriggled and snuggled and her crimson hair spread in twists over the pillow. 'Please don't bother,' said she, 'don't you see, I spend most of my life naked, and a great deal of it up to my neck in water——' and here she shuddered—'and it's a lovely change for me to be in a comfortable bed.' She appeared to forget me altogether and stared at the ceiling, as though neither I nor anything else (except all things) existed. This went on for five minutes or so. Then I began to reflect that, after all, it was my room and my bed, and I was entitled to go to sleep untroubled. The clock was ticking; the gondolas, now rare, splashed by; I was going to the ancient cathedral of Torcello in the morning; why on earth should I be kept awake by a total stranger who had invaded my room, not even explaining who she was or why she had come?

"It took me a long time to make up my mind. But I couldn't go to sleep with that compromising creature there; after all, she might be seen by a maid, and then where should I be? Ruthless, and in spite of her probably bogus snores, I nudged her in the ribs. She appeared to wake, though I don't believe she had ever been asleep, passed her fingers over her eyes, turned towards me, gazing dreamily, and said: 'Sorry, what is it?'

"'Look here,' I said, 'you say you are Truth, and I daresay you are, but I don't see why you shouldn't observe the ordinary courtesies and decencies of life.' Sleepily she replied: 'Oh yeah!'

"The Americanism stung me. I had always thought that Truth would talk English, or (at the worst) French. What on earth have I got mixed up with, thought I, and how can I get rid of this perfectly awful woman? But at that moment, in spite of her affectation of an American accent, she was looking rather gentle and charming. I thought: 'Damn it all, tiresome as she is, she isn't so bad. Can't I give her something she'd like?' I thought of fruit—there was some in the room, ripe pears and apples. I touched her sleepy head: 'Would you like an apple?' I said.

"She sat up at once. I reached out for an apple from the table.

" 'I should jolly well think so,' she replied, taking it, 'considering (at any rate, according to one story) that if it hadn't been for apples nobody would have bothered about me at all.'

" 'Oh, don't say that,' said I impetuously. 'People couldn't have overlooked a person like you for long.' 'Nonsense,' she replied, taking a great bite out of the apple.

"She closed her eyes and munched it contentedly. A distant chugging from the direction of the Lido reminded me of the outside world and the oddity of the situation. There was I, propped on my elbow, contemplating the pretty face of a completely strange young woman with a half-eaten apple in her hand and an expression of utter insouciance on her face. Insouciance! thought I, it almost amounts to impudence! And then I realised that the red of her lips was paint, and that her old-gold complexion was not entirely innocent of

powder. How could Truth thus lie? I reflected. Minutes passed, she resting immobile in the silence and the rosy light.

"Suddenly her eyes opened, her eyebrows lifted, she pouted and shot a mocking glance at me. 'You don't seem to have much to say to a girl,' she remarked; 'I must have been mistaken when I thought you liked me.' I deserved it, I knew. 'Oh,' I said, 'I'm frightfully sorry, how dreadfully rude of me! I was thinking about you, really. Would you think it insolent of me if I asked you an absolutely straight question, as man to man?'

" 'As man to what?' she asked with quiet disdain. I felt myself flush, as so often, with anger. 'I do wish you wouldn't pick one up so! You know quite well what I mean.'

" 'All right, don't be annoyed,' she returned; 'what was it you wanted to know?' 'Well, just this—and I don't care if you get in a rage with me or not: how can you be Truth when you use make-up?'

" 'Oh, is that all?' she replied. 'That's quite easy. It's just to show that you mustn't judge by appearances. Have you ever read Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*?'

"I admitted that I had, but that youth had been my excuse. But I discovered early, I added, that I wasn't meant for philosophy. 'Nor are the philosophers,' she replied. 'Look, I ask you, at the complications of that Bradley. Can you really think I'm as dull and confused as all that? As a matter of fact, I'm a simple girl, I am.'

"I felt indignant, and sympathetic towards all the philosophers who, for thousands of years, had adored

their imaginary pictures of this minx, and spent their whole lives looking for her. Ungrateful creature, thought I; even if she *is* a goddess she doesn't deserve to be one. My cynicism expressed itself. 'Can I offer you a cigarette?' I asked, reaching out for one from the table on my left. 'Other girls may—I don't,' she remarked contemptuously. Checked and chilled I removed my proffered hand and smoke. 'Oh, for God's sake don't take me literally,' she snapped. 'Of course I'll have one.'

"Patient as ever I returned the cigarette and painstakingly lit it. She puffed. 'Now look here——' she began. 'Yes?' said I. 'Damn you and your yesses,' she snarled. 'Are you listening?' 'Of course I'm listening,' I replied, 'and in any case, since you weren't asked to come in here, and are robbing me of my sleep, you might at least keep a civil tongue in your head.' This seemed to soften her; I got the impression that she rather liked people to face up to her.

"'Don't get angry,' she observed, in a quite mild tone. 'It's only my way. Haven't you heard I'm stranger than fiction? Besides,' she added, completely bewildering me, 'it all helps to create atmosphere, doesn't it?' Unable to think of any other answer I naturally, and humbly, replied: 'Oh yes, of course. Yes.' 'Now you're being sensible,' she said. And then flinging the cigarette on the floor, and sitting up with an exposed torso (which embarrassed neither of us, as we were thinking of the things of the mind), 'I'm absolutely sick of lying in this prone position. I want to talk to you, my lad.' 'All right; lovely!' said I. 'You mayn't think it

so lovely after all,' she remarked; 'I might as well come straight to the point.' 'Please do,' said I, in the emphatic accents which a man uses when he is utterly at a loss as to how to be pleasant to a pretty but puzzling woman.

"She sat upright in the bed. I, happily covered by my pyjama-coat, sat up too, wondering what on earth was going to come next. She stared straight in front of her as though she was gazing through the opposite wall, dressing-table mirror, country-side views and all. 'Are you prepared,' she enquired, 'for me to talk to you quite seriously?' 'Why on earth not?' I asked impatiently. 'All right,' she went on, 'don't get hot and bothered! But it appears to me you attach too much importance to all those silly philosophers . . . give me another cigarette.'

"I gave her another cigarette, lighted it, dimly apprehended the humming of a motor-boat far out on the lagoon, and then stuck up for myself. 'I don't know,' I said, 'why you should single me out as one who stands up for the philosophers. In point of fact there are a great many people who stand up for them much more than I do. But, since you force me to say something, I don't think they're too bad. After all, even if they never really understood you, they did love you and try to understand.' 'Love—my foot!' said she inelegantly, 'they didn't care two hoots about me—they only loved their own silly ideas!' 'That's very unfair!' I replied. 'Dash it all, think of Plato who dedicated his whole life to you!'

"'Oh yes, Life and Works,' she interrupted, with a worse sneer than any she had worn before, 'Plato, potato.

Ideas and all that. Do you really suppose that I'd reveal myself to a man who gave rise to an adjective like "platonic"?"

"Please, please, please!" I observed, 'don't get excited. I only want a quiet talk—I simply want to get at the truth.'

"Well, aren't I the Truth?" she observed. 'Of course, my dear, I know you are,' I answered, 'but I want you to be fair to the people who have spent their lives loving and looking for you, instead of seeming to keep something up your sleeve.' 'I don't care tuppence for the lot of them,' she retorted; 'besides, I've never had a sleeve, so how can I keep anything up it?' She lay down and snuggled under the bed-clothes.

"Furious, and resolved not to be baffled, I grabbed her round the waist, sat her up, and said: 'Sleep if you want to, you can sleep in five minutes, but you're jolly well not going to until you've answered a few questions I want to ask *you*. . . .' She rose and looked at me almost flirtatiously. 'Very well, sir,' said she, in the accents of a subservient chambermaid.

"Well," said I, 'I know it's late and I know you're tired, and I don't want to be discourteous. But anyhow, I didn't ask you to come here—you've been a damned nuisance, and I think I'm entitled——' A tremulous smile went over her lids and lips, her head now again resting on the pillow. 'Remember the Old School tie!' she whispered. 'I could wring your neck!' I exclaimed, exasperated.

"Everybody would like to wring Truth's neck," she replied. 'But somehow, nobody ever succeeds in doing it.'

She always will prevail, you know.' I wanted to, but as I looked at her I knew I simply couldn't. 'Yes,' I said, 'I quite agree. Nothing would please me better than wringing your neck, but I can't do it, and that's that. You are being too annoying for words. You might at least answer the few simple questions I want to ask you.' She wriggled sleepily on the pillow, momentarily unveiled a pair of far from sleepy eyes, shut them again and said: 'All right. I didn't say I wouldn't answer them, did I?' Lord, these women! I thought, but after all, especially in the presence of Truth, one must face facts as one finds them. So I put it to her.

" 'Now, listen!' I said, 'I don't care whether you go or stay, but you've got to admit that you've been grossly unfair to those poor old gentlemen who've done their best for you.' 'High bald domes and long white beards!' came the murmur from the pillow. 'You've ridiculed Plato——' I insisted. 'Oh, *go on*,' she said, 'just go on like all the other silly men who fall in love with illusions. If you want to know, I couldn't stand Plato at any price. He was simply a dreamer.' 'Well,' said I, 'at least you can't say that about Aristotle.' She shook her head on the pillow. 'Oh, for God's sake,' she muttered, 'don't talk to me about Aristotle. He was almost as bad as Bacon.'

" 'Surely both of them cared about Truth?' I queried. She flung herself up and cried: 'They didn't! They didn't! They didn't! They didn't care for me one little bit; they only cared about facts, for all their beastly brains.' She collapsed back again on the pillow and sobbed and sobbed. 'All you do,' she lamented, 'is to pity all those silly old men and you don't think at all

about what I've suffered at their hands. You men are all the same!' It's difficult enough, as every grown man knows, to console and comfort even a woman with whom one is intimately acquainted, but think of consoling a *déesse incomprise*, a refractory female whom one has never met before, and a border-line goddess at that. There was still the throbbing of a motor-boat on the lagoon; I looked at the still face and the recumbent form and I simply didn't know what to say. My problem was resolved by the lady. She peeped over her arm. 'I wonder, dearie,' she said in a cajoling manner, 'that you didn't mention Schopenhauer.'

" 'Well,' I said, stumbingly, 'I don't much like him myself, and I think he must have been dyspeptic, but I do think he cared for you and that you ought to honour him.' She sprang up until she was almost out of the bed, her face contorted, her mouth working, her eyes as red as a ferret's. 'What!' she yelled, 'that horrible German beast? Why, he was a woman-hater!' Soothingly, her voice changed; in an enchantress's manner she said: 'Do *you* think I'm ugly?'

"I leant over her, as languorously she lay, and saw her face change from beauty to beauty; now that of a proud Egyptian queen, now that of a mysterious sibyl, now that of the soul of knowledge, now that of the soul of love, now that of a demure young virgin, innocent and wistful, early Florentine. In that one face, in that one minute, I saw all earthly and unearthly beauties.

" 'How,' thought I, 'could I ever have doubted this woman? Why should such a brute as myself have been vouchsafed such a vision?'

"She opened her eyes.

" 'Well,' said she, 'did you like it?'

"I couldn't answer.

" 'Anyhow,' she continued, 'do *you* think I'm ugly?'

" 'Goodness, goodness no!' I exclaimed, 'you're the loveliest thing that ever I saw in my life!'

" 'That's just where you're mistaken,' she remarked, very slowly and solemnly; and facing me square, squeezing up her eyes, projecting her lower jaw, and thrusting out her tongue between teeth that suddenly seemed to have grown like fangs: 'I can look like this, my boy, and don't you forget it! Oh no, it's no good thinking of hitting me. Even if you tried to, you couldn't hit *me*!'

" 'I wasn't even thinking of hitting you,' I grumbled.

" 'Don't lie!' she said. 'You can't take Truth in by lies, you know.'

" 'I wasn't lying!' I said.

" 'Don't lie again,' said she, looking as cunning as Satan. Then she turned her face into an image of The Soul's Awakening.

" 'I'm not lying!' I almost shouted; 'I'm only trying to understand you. You come in here and rob me of my sleep and I do my damndest to find out what you want and I honestly think if you'd stay long enough and explain it I might be able to produce it, and it's horribly unfair of you to be evasive and elusive. I also think it's unfair of you to be so abusive about those unfortunate philosophers who only tried to do their best for you.'

"She leapt out of the bed.

"‘If anybody ever catches *me*,’ she said disdainfully, ‘it will be a poet!’

"‘I moved to spring after her.

"‘Why shouldn’t it be *me*?’ I cried.

"‘Stay where you are!’ she cried imperatively, stretching herself to her full naked height. I stayed where I was, as though shackled by iron.

"‘Sorry, old thing!’ she said, ‘I’ve got to get back to my well!’

"Of course, she had the last word. Raising both arms and crooking both elbows she snapped the thumbs and fingers of both hands. There was a kind of whirling in the air, the lights swam, and when they settled down again she was gone.

"But there I was, in the bedroom of a Venetian hotel, with the water lapping against the sides of the moored gondolas and one solitary motor-boat humming far off in the distance. My hand automatically stretched out. It caught a paper; I lifted it up and gazed again at the effigy on the cover—that erect, virtuous, innocuous, sexless, lamp-bearing personality—so straight, so incapable of humour, beauty, wit or cruelty.

"‘You call yourself Truth,’ I murmured, ‘but little do you know what Truth really is!’ ”

* * * *

It is all very well. But would you believe it? Just when I had finished telling Aubrey the story about my dream (if dream it was) I put out a hand in gesticulation, heard a dim crash, sprang up, listened for footsteps with a palpitating heart, switched on the bed-head light and

saw the floor strewn with books, fruit, plate, knife and broken glass, and realized that I had never told Aubrey the story at all, that I had dreamt I had told him about my dream (if it was a dream), that I had gone to bed and that I had had no dialogue with him at all! All the comments he had made; all my impatient retorts (not here recorded) about Anatole France's easy play with easy erudition, references to Tanagra statuettes and the philosophic fragments of Hypodermos of Syringa, were the mere smoke of slumber.

Happily it hadn't been a nightmare; I hadn't been falling over cliffs, fighting goblins who came together when hewn to pieces, or taking ten giant crocodiles on at once; so I rearranged my pillows, turned out the light, curled up, and did not wake again until——

FOURTH DAY

ONCE more the sunshine was streaming through the window, and Aubrey was standing there in a florid silk red dressing-gown, carrying an equally florid blue one for me.

"Look here, Aubrey," I said, "I can't tell you how I've enjoyed my stay here. When I set out I thought I might see somebody in Kent and somebody in Wiltshire; but it was ever so much nicer seeing you."

"All right," said he, "but you must have breakfast before you go; what about a little cold bacon?"

Cold bacon it was, with the kind of chopped-up potatoes that I knew in Devonshire when I was a boy. Gorged, I remarked: "Old thing, it's extraordinarily nice being here, but I simply must get on, for I have promised to be in Devonshire by a certain date."

"All right," he commented sulkily, "if you must go, you must go. I expect you will go farther and fare worse; but have it your own way."

He looked rather pathetic. It might be months before anybody who knew his primary language turned up again: he had his farm, his books, his Sally, and his neighbours, but all the winter might pass before he met another man who had heard of Baudelaire and Verlaine, let alone translating them at school. I was sorry for him (just as I was envious of him—he the Settled, I the Visitor, on and over the land we both loved) but I

really had to remember that I was a householder with a programme, a father with a family, and an author with a contract.

So I set my upper lip and, to the epilogue of an orchestra of barking dogs, left him for the second time.

I went out of the village. I remembered, as I went, a poem which I had written when I was young, all about a man walking out of a village to the rainy hills, remembering the old gaffers and grannies, the blacksmith's shop, the old oak with the immemorial seat under it and the dogs asleep on the doorsteps in the middle of the day. That poem I never published, for I knew it was false; I preferred *Cranford* and Miss Mitford, and thought that the dogs were sensible to lie on the doorsteps in the idle of the day. But now I was forsaking all the comfort which was open to me to go off into the . . .

But of course I wasn't going "off into the . . ."

The world is getting gradually (I think it is the word) "taped." Young men wander, with cameras, through Chinese Turkestan and the Gran Chaco, and come back rather bored, to talk deprecatingly at cocktail parties about places concerning which Sir John Mandeville mightily lied, and of which all Othello knew was that there were people there who ate strange flesh, and others whose heads grew beneath their shoulders—whom we now knew not to have existed, whatever may have been the truth in Othello's time. All I was doing, never having heard the Abyssinian bird sing at that season of the year or been tempted to shoot an albatross, was to set out on a walk, well furnished with clothes and money, in the

easiest climate and country in the world, and able to stop when I liked and where I liked.

Stop I did; on the top of a hill which surveyed fields (which looked good partridge-fields) and woods, which seemed to offer, provided the keepers and beaters got the birds up properly, good pheasant shooting. On that summit I rested, at about twelve-thirty, and took out of my pocket a hunk of bread and the last (if, indeed, it was the last) of Aubrey's cold bacon.

* * * *

Seated alone, with a world of downland and sky around me, I found myself thinking of shooting. It was August, and already in Scotland the annual campaign had begun; men were standing in butts, all their senses keyed up to animal intensity, and for months now the whole island would ring with shots.

Suddenly remembering, I took from my pocket some tattered scraps of paper which I had intermittently carried about with me for years whenever there seemed a chance of leisure for concentration and completion, and which I had deliberately brought with me this time. On a sparkling November morning, starting early across the uplands for a day's pheasant shooting, I had felt exalted by the freshness of the earth, stopped the car, and written down lines whose meaning was perhaps more implicit than explicit:

Could something stir in the lines
Of the dark pines,
And the pale ponds,
And the fronds

LAST YEAR'S SHOOTING

Of the bracken that browns
On the downs:
Could a word come down from the sky
So blue, so pure, and so high.

And that night I sat alone, in front of a fire, in my study and meditated on the day and the poetry of it.

At luncheon in a hut over a tree-girt lake, we had been talking, as shooting men sometimes do talk, about the pros and cons of the pursuit, reassuring ourselves with the usual commonplaces about pheasants dying as comfortably as farmyard fowls and the absurdity of meat-eating reformers attacking "blood sports." Somebody had said that, though he did occasionally like to let off his gun, he believed that the chief joy he found in a day's shooting was got between drives—all the wild life that was not shot and the lovely seclusion of preserves. Reflecting on all this alone I remembered many ecstatic moments I had had when shooting, twilights by duck-ponds, mornings on Scotch mountains, woodlands in mist, the glimpse of a wild deer in a Sussex thicket, the gorgeous feathers of a pheasant half-buried in deep snow, with drops of its blood looking like dry crimson dust on the soft whiteness. I was soon in a complex of memories and bewilderments, at one moment trying to recover a precise scene or train of thought and emotion, and at another wandering off in contemplation of the lives and deaths of birds and men; and then my mind harked back to the lines I had written in the morning and I thought they might be the opening of a poem on all the aspects of shooting and the vistas which it opens up, and in a heat of

imagination I wrote, very rapidly, several disjointed passages which I thought might fit later into some shapely frame as yet undesigned.

There was a passage about watching a single high partridge coming over a hedge like a black star in the sky, and how, in its swift mounting approach it looks so intent and almost vindictive, like a bolt from the sling of an enemy, and how, the moment one goes to pick it up behind one, it seems so frail and harmless:

Here, alas!

Here it is on the grass.

Here dead did it fall;

And now lies so pathetic and small,

Weary small head, soft feathers, a little bird,

Such as long ago heard,

Standing eager and trustful arow,

(Heads up, being little) the happy miraculous words,

The voice of the tender St. Francis, so patient and slow

As he spoke to the birds:

As he told the small birds that brothers, though simple,
they were,

And the Lord had a thought for the fate of each bird of
the air;

Though three farthings each worth

It was known to the Lord as the greatest and proudest
on earth. . . .

And he, 'neath the sky,

So vasty and frore,

Though a gown and a rope and a cowl and a halo he
wore

Knew no more of the wherefore and why
Than the stupidest bird of them all.

He told them also (I thought) that men, like birds, were timid and feared for their children and fluttered in senseless alarm—and I remembered a place where all these thoughts had flashed through my head, simultaneously (for one's thoughts have no regard for consistency and decency) with the old jingle about Frederick, Prince of Wales:

Here lies Fred,
Who was alive and is dead,
There's no more to be said.

I went to pick the bird up; everything was as it was a few seconds before when it was alive and flying. There was an orchard of apple trees behind, a few brave clinging leaves and ruddy globes of fruit. Beyond the trees was a farm, and a child calling to another; up the hillside a plough was jingling; a car moaned by; but the bird was dead and nothing could bring it to life; and another bird, though it knew nothing of death or destiny, would be cold without a mate. And I consoled myself with common-sense reflections about the universality of death, and the mercifulness of this as compared with what birds have to face from Nature—frost, shortage of berries or water, the murderous nips of stoat and rat and fox—and I recalled how often that partridge, in unnecessary fright, had flown as fast before, because of passing cars or labourers, and how it had never known it was alive, or even for a moment that it was seeing the sun for the last time.

All that, seasons ago, I had written down. And I had tried to recover in verse the whole thrill of expectation in a ride curving through copses—alone in the world with a gun, the other guns hidden somewhere, young bare trees all around, twigs and fallen leaves on the dry grass, a pale sky and silence everywhere. There is a long wait, and then a rustle, and then silence again. There is a distant cry, a distant shot, and then silence again; and then there is a loud rattle of leaves in front and an old cock patters up, pauses, starts again, stares, then hurries on stirring leaves as he goes. Another rustle and a rabbit goes back; a jay crooks away; a grey squirrel meets its end; and then tap-tap, tap-tap, far right and far left and in front, comes the slow, relentless advance of the beaters, and rustling becomes multitudinous, and sly phantoms can be descried darting about in the depths of the wood, the cunninger, stealthier, quicker, and some scuttle forward and run sideways, and come back because of the tapping and stop on the flank, and the beaters grow louder and louder, and at last there is nothing for it but to take wing and soar, and then amid halloes and fusillades they break out in swarms. . .

For the hundredth time I looked at these fragments of paper high on that Hampshire down, and I knew at last that I should never finish them and why. What I had thought of was the sort of comprehensive poem that could really only be written in the mood and manner of the eighteenth century—the more intense moments would never “connect up.” What is the good of keeping all these pieces of paper and backs of old envelopes with the pencil gradually rubbing off? Why be encumbered with

what will never come to anything? With a pang I tore up some hundreds of lines, of which I now remember but few, and, out of respect for the Anti-Litter Campaign put them down a rabbit-hole. So if the really solid shooting poem is ever to be composed somebody else will have to do it.

As I went on my way I felt for a moment very much relieved. Why, when one is dead certain one will never finish a piece of work, does one waste time and trouble continually taking it up again in a sort of preposterous hope that by some miracle it will have shed its defects or even expanded, as though manuscripts could mature in storage, like wine, or sprout like seed potatoes? "Anyhow," I comforted myself, "what does it matter? there is a date to the durability even of the Venus di Milo, and I don't suppose this would have been that." Then I remembered the parable of the talents and the dying man who murmured: "So much to do, so little done," and then, for the ten thousandth time said, "down, devil, down" to hesitation and fruitless internal debate.

"Are you really going back to that rabbit-hole?"

"No."

"Well, forget all about it then, and remember, 'Would that he had blotted a thousand . . .'"

There was no wind. The great downs swelled away on both sides under a pure sky. I swung on and down to Winchester. There I thought of having one more look at Sir Herbert Baker's beautiful (in spite of its difficult lettering) War Memorial Cloister: it seems a pity that we should have to owe such things as that and Giles Scott's

grand chapel at Charterhouse to the deaths of the young. But I did not go. I went through Winchester without stopping, wondering if they were really going to scar Saint Catherine's Hill with a by-pass or some such road, a white weal. "Ten to one on," I thought; and wondered once more what maladies they were which made us destroy recklessly the beauty we have inherited, making long rural streets instead of villages, allow people to erect the vast majority of our buildings without employing an architect, and appoint more and more professors of Town Planning whilst doing less and less Town Planning and even destroying squares, terraces and crescents which were built by our ancestors who had never heard of Town Planning but merely did it. I searched my mind for examples in the past of villainies as bad as our own. After all there was that prime instance of Sir Christopher Wren who planned an entirely new London after the Fire, but the parsimonious and unimaginative tradesmen insisted on having the whole thing run up on precisely the same old lines, much to the detriment of modern traffic and of the eyesight of people in City offices. And think of the amount of destruction of our mediæval glories under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Cromwell, and by all the vandals of the eighteenth century! But the worst of it is that what they put up in the place of the old was not bad, and that even Nash himself, though no great architect with his stucco falsities, did plan and did put up harmonious things. It remained for the nineteenth century to discover architectural ugliness and for the twentieth to scatter it all over the place as from a pepper-pot and to spread it in straight lines beyond the

urban centres with increasing rapidity. Think of the Great West Road ten years ago and now! It was virgin country with orchards; it might have been a string of pretty villages; it is now a jerry-builder's wilderness. Think of the even-newer Watford By-Pass, full of Baronial Halls and Cosy Palaces with new graves for peace and beauty being dug daily! Spirits of Adam Smith, Peel, Arkwright and Hargreaves behold your work! Spirit of Pugin, never come back to revisit these glimpses but keep company in the shades with Ruskin, Morris and the strong men before Agamemnon! But spirit of the Reverend Mr. Malthus, return to smile sardonically at the generations which have followed you and pullulate in these many-millioned towns without outlet!

I walked on, down a long tree-bordered hill, with the great dark branches of the trees motionless and a powder of golden sunlight coming between them in shafts as in an eighteenth-century landscape. It is still a peaceful road, with little to offend the eye; most of the westward traffic goes through Romsey.

The side-roads off it would be more peaceful still, and there is this compensation for great main roads (if not for the unholy messes that are made along them while officialdom turns its back and prosecutes people for selling chocolates five minutes after hours), that they do canalize motor-traffic, most of the drivers preferring to dash as fast and as far as possible. In a way main-roads may be regarded as main drains for motorists; a man who chooses his roads carefully,

whether walking or driving, may go as quietly as ever he did.

At five o'clock I was at Stockbridge, an unspoilt little place with a pleasant hotel which has a round portico, and a garden at the back, and is the headquarters of an ancient fishing club which fishes the Test. Had it been a little later I might have gone in and met, perhaps, over a tankard somebody who would have told me something about the season's fishing. I have never dropped fly, or for that matter (has anyone ever?) worm in that stream, as sacred in the eyes of some of my friends as ever was the Tiber to the ancient Romans. The Grosvenor is, as it were, the Capitol of the Test, and I should have had my small contribution to the talk, for years ago it was in the Test that I had seen the largest trout that—never having been to New Zealand, where they swell enormously like the red deer—I had ever seen in my life. It was at Long Parish, up by Whitchurch, when Guy Dawnay had it; a comfortable old house with a long stretch of the Test running through water meadows. As we walked along it in the afternoon the surface was covered with mallard, teal and moorhens, but I had no eyes for them, as wherever one looked into the clear stream there were monstrous fish, slowly waving their tails, which seem in recollection like dark torpedoes, and to have numbered hundreds. But that perhaps is the way of fish in recollection. What is certain is that that property (a revolting word—there are people who would call Windsor Castle a fine property) has seen things as remarkable as mammoth trout. It was in front of the drawing-room windows that a cuckoo settled on the hair

of the owner's small daughter and laid an egg, a photograph of the strange event appearing later in *Country Life*! It was also the scene, a hundred years ago, of the last (as of many a previous) exploit of Colonel Peter Hawker who may have been, and by his own statement must have been, the greatest gameshot of all time, though he may not have accumulated the 600,000 odd head of the late Lord Ripon. He lived for shooting and his diaries are the raciest reading; he records with such complacency the way in which he would go out alone, with man and dog, and get thirty woodcock, snipe or partidges with as many shots. The trouble was he would shoot anything: the celebrated anecdote about the late Sir William Eden might well have been applied to him.

I remember when I was young a not very literate habitual burglar came to me for assistance and advice. He wanted a new leaf and a job. I asked him what steps he had already taken to obtain one, and he said he had applied to the then Home Secretary, Mr. Herbert Gladstone, for a job as a hangman. "What did you say to him?" I asked. "I sent 'im," said he, "a nice piece o' rope I'd made and told 'im that 'e could bring any man 'e liked to me, and I'd 'ang 'im." The letter, I daresay, was passed from basket to basket for comment; at any rate Charlie L. did not get the office. Peter Hawker, a man of similar scope, was on his death-bed. A bird perched on his window-sill. The window was open. The colonel asked weakly for his gun, which was always by his bedside. He raised it and fired. The bird fell. He had made his last kill. It was an owl.

I passed a road on the left leading to the Wallops—

Nether Wallop, Middle Wallop and Over Wallop—and remembered that when I had first heard of them I had been sad that one of the new public schools had not been founded there. “Nether Wallop *v.* Birchington,” at Lord’s, should certainly have drawn the crowds. But, in point of fact, the Wallops are older than the verb they suggest. It was Sir John Wallop, of Wallop, who in the thirteenth century so smote the French at sea that he endowed the language with a new word like Captain Boycott, Mr. Hansom, Mr. Macadam, Mr. Macintosh and others. I was sorry I had not time for the Wallops; strung along their little stream they make as pretty and secluded a walk as any in these parts, though the incidental architectural beauties hardly compare with those of the hamlets which lie along the valley of the Coln in the Cotswolds. On the left past Lobscombe Corner there was a hill where part of a wood had been felled and was now in evening sunshine solid red with willow-herb which delights in clearings of all sorts. Then a mile or two more brought me to the Pheasant, south of which are the Winterslows, frequented by Hazlitt. Much as one may regret the way in which many brewers take down old inn-signs and replace them by unnecessary advertisements of, or unconscious warnings against, their own beer, and much as one applauds those who continue the old habit, I confess that the sign of this particular Pheasant seems to me rather too large. And thus was I meditating when I realised that the hour was late, that I was tired and very hungry, and that there was a bus coming up behind me.

Somebody else got out with her bundle; I got in with

mine; and in a quarter of an hour I was in Salisbury. A few minutes more brought me to a hotel which Aubrey had mentioned to me as being much more suitable to me than the ancient hostelry which I had always used in the town and which he said (though he admitted he had never seen it) must be full of copper warming-pans, Americans, and the ghost of William Pitt. When I saw the Victorian pile he had sent me to I wondered at his taste; but I was tired, the place was no doubt comfortable to every sense except that of the eye, I took a room, sent my things to it, washed, had a latish dinner of soup, fried plaice and cheese, and then walked into the lounge, sat down and rang for coffee.

I looked around. There were several wicker chairs, three Scotch managers of engineering works (as I supposed—one had his back to me, the others were obvious) and the usual collection of unreadable papers. I didn't want to read until I went to bed, if then, and I wondered what to do with the next hour or so. I remembered the Close: how, long ago, having come on alone from Mells I had missed the man with whom I expected to stay, and wandered about Salisbury on a summer night, with few people in the sable-and-silver streets, golden lights in the upper windows, and come at last to the Close and seen that great spire fretted in the moonlight, and walked all round past the comfortable old houses, with here the soft music of a quartette behind blinds, and here an uncurtained window and a glimpse of shirt-fronts, mahogany and plate, and then walked off in the silence listening to the echo of my own footsteps and thinking of a story, sad, but not altogether so, springing

from it all, which I wrote long afterwards. To-night there was no moon and I was tired; besides, one never should try to recapture perfection, though it should always be striven after, in any particular world, until it is attained.

I thought, feeling at once solitary and yet in no great need of actual talk (as the past and tenderness were upon me), that I might as well go through the corridor to the bar, sit in a corner, have a nightcap, and watch and listen to whatever habitués might be present. I threaded my way through, swung open a door, and there, confronting me as though I had come to my expected place, like the stars in the *Ancient Mariner*, were the rotund jocularity of Aubrey's face and the petite merriment of Sally's. Two tankards were waved at me. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Aubrey, his mouth wide, his eyes closed. "We've been waiting for you for an hour, but we knew you'd come. Where the devil were you when we passed you on the road?" He laughed again, as though his simple stratagem of recommending this hotel to me were an elaborate joke; I fully expected him to pull cold bacon or fish out of his pockets. But no, he had merely driven twenty-four miles or so (having presumably looked to his garden and done his quantum of the *History of the Thoroughbred*) in order to spring a small surprise; and when, just after, the barmaid announced: "Time, gentlemen, please!" he parted on the doorstep, and groaned off eastward quite happily, a warning against o'er-vaulting ambition and a testimonial to the simple life.

I went back to the wickerwork lounge. The two

heavier of the Scotch engineering experts (if that they were) had gone off yawning to bed, having expressed all the usual opinions, doubts and alarms about France, Germany, the League, Italy and Signor Mussolini. The third remained, a major-in-the-Territorials-looking man, with tidy grey hair, bright sympathetic eyes, long vertical lines on his sallow cheeks, a close-cut grey moustache and an honest strong chin. He had obviously just ordered a last toddy and his glance invited conversation. I returned his look, pressed a bell, and came up and sat beside him, affecting to pick up an old number of an illustrated weekly. The waiter came in and I ordered. Asked the stranger: "Know this place well?"

"The town, yes," I said, "but this hotel, no."

"Staying long?"

"Only to-night; and you?"

"Only to-night. As a fact I'm walking to Devonshire. I suppose you and your friends are on a motor-tour?"

"In point of fact I'm alone. They're not my friends. I never set eyes on them until to-night. Very decent fellows, though. Scotchmen."

"I couldn't help overhearing you. You none of you seem to have been very cheerful about the situation."

"Well, who could be? It seemed to be getting brighter before this chap Musso began breathing fire and slaughter against these damned Abyssinians. I've not much use for the Abyssinians: I had a brother-in-law on the Somali-land frontier. They can't control their own people. Steal women, slaves, cattle, do any damn thing. But damn it all, they're in the League, and if people start breaking treaties at this hour of the day what the devil is

the good of making them. Pity! A year or so ago Musso looked about the soundest of the lot. Now they're only waiting for the rains to stop and hell will be let loose. Another wretched European war, I suppose."

He jerked up his chin resignedly and took a long drink. He had obviously been through the last one. "What do you make of it?" he asked, turning to me, as I daresay one helpless Cabinet Minister, in *tête-à-tête*, has often turned to another.

There was stillness over the wickerwork and the engravings on the walls. There was a rattle and clink from the service department behind the shutter, and lights seemed to be going out beyond the lounge in which we sat. A waiter peered round the door: "Anything more before the bar closes, gentlemen?" he asked. "No," we replied, "good night." "Good night," came back as from one who had to see all hatches down after the last of us had passed to bed. "I suppose we had better go up," I said, sleepy, although he was an agreeable man.

"I suppose so," said the major (if such he was), "but I wish to God I could make out what the devil that fella Musso is up to. Did you ever meet anybody who'd talked to him?"

We were out of the door and at the foot of the stairs.

"As a matter of fact I have myself," I said. "It didn't amount to much, but I'll tell you about it in the morning if you like. What time do you breakfast?"

"Half-past eight."

"Call it nine and I'll join you."

FIFTH DAY

"I SAY," said the major, as I ordered a raw egg and milk, "is that all you ever have for breakfast?"

"As a rule," I assured him. "Tea and coffee are racial poisons." I had had my tea in bed.

The two Scotchmen, who had breakfasted early, walked out of the coffee-room with a reserved nod to their casual, though temporarily cordial, companion of the night before, and the door closed behind them for ever. They knew neither of our names, nor we each other's, nor ever would. Ships pass each other, with a hail, every night in country hotels, giving neither name nor port of destination. In two days the major and I would have discovered that we knew each other's cousins at school; but there were not two days, so it wasn't necessary.

We looked at the newspapers. The major finished his fish, his kidneys and bacon, his toast and marmalade, and his three cups of coffee. Looking at his watch and carefully folding his napkin: "Do you feel like a cigarette in the lounge?" he asked.

"Rather; my time's my own." Outside the window the sky looked none too promising. It was, in fact, a depressing mixture of yellow and indigo; a sky low and windless. We drew two chairs together in the fireless place, and lit cigarettes. "You said," remarked the major, "that you once talked to Mussolini. What's he like? Is he as grim as he looks?" "Not in the least," I

assured him; "I found him thoroughly attractive. A lot of poetry and humour about him." Then I told him what I could remember.

It happened like this. About six years ago an Italian friend of mine, one of the veterans of Italian letters, was lunching with me in London; he heard I was going to Italy the following Easter and asked me if there was anybody I wanted to meet. I answered purely in jest, not thinking the thing practicable as I was not an interviewer and had no political mission: "Oh, Mussolini, of course." He replied: "Oh, I think *that* can be arranged," and proceeded to talk about pictures.

Three months later I was dining with him in Florence and he remarked, out of the blue, that when I got to Rome I was to let the Foreign Office know, for the interview had been arranged. I was thoroughly surprised, and also a little shy about invading the presence of the busiest man in Europe out of what began to appear to me as mere vulgar curiosity. "Are you sure that I shouldn't be making myself a nuisance?" I asked. "Certainly not," he replied, "I told them you were an Englishman who wrote poetry," and, as though the matter was closed, turned to exhibit the charms of a Greek marble head.

As soon as I got to my hotel in Rome I was informed that Signor X at the Palazzo Venezia wanted me on the telephone; the news, I must say, being broken to me with a deference to which I am not accustomed. I rang up and a young and pleasant voice asked me if a certain hour next evening would suit me. I said: "Yes," and a written confirmation was sent.

Next day I took a cab along the old Appian Way, full of pot-holes, and lined with ancient tombs and broken fragments of pious inscriptions (for the old Romans were as polite on their tombstones as we are), and so to Lake Nemi, which the Government had recently half-drained in order to recover the state barge of Caligula which legend had asserted to have been full of treasure. Legend spoke truly in regard to the galley being there; but legend, with its usual passion for buried treasure, had overlooked the fact that even the maddest of rich men would hardly keep all his valuables in a house-boat, and all that was actually recovered with the framework of the vessel was some tiles and a few bronze heads of animals which were part of the decorations. But, turning from the venerable timbers and looking at the muddy ring of cliff which the draining had left between the lowest belt of trees and the lake-surface, I suddenly thought: "Here have hundreds of thousands of pounds been spent on an enterprise which no previous Italian Government would have undertaken. The same thing is going on at Herculaneum which pre-war governments refused to do anything about, although it was far grander than Pompeii. Everybody says: "Il Duce is doing this and Il Duce is doing that. The man holds half the Cabinet posts. I wonder how much he really knows about what his subordinates are doing under his inspiration." So there was a notion as to conversation; provided, that is, that Signor Mussolini was one of those rare eminences who allowed conversation to be two-sided. What could he know about his own alleged excavations when he was looking after Earth, Sea and Air, Industry, Roads and

extremely-strained relations abroad? "Never mind the League of Nations," I thought; "let us see what he has to say about archæology."

I got back to Rome, and at half-past seven (if it was half-past seven) took a taxi through the rain to that majestic building which used to be the Venetian Embassy and from the balcony of which Il Duce so frequently addresses the troops and anybody else who happens to be standing about. After passing various sentinels I reached an upper landing; was received by a most courteous young secretary who spoke perfect English; and was shown into an ante-chamber where two middle-aged Americans who looked like anxious business men with a "proposition" were already waiting. Il Duce, I was told, would be late. He was detained at the Chamber where he had to make a speech defending some Minister or other against an onslaught. This sounded odd to me at first: why can't the Whips look after the votes as they would in England? I wondered. But then I realized that where there is only one party there may be a special kind of freedom to criticize details of administration, for only one man's fate is at stake and nothing can rob the party of office or the government of power.

There for about an hour we sat, amid the marbles and the brocades and the busts of dead Venetians. The daylight faded, and now and then the business men murmured piteously together as though the waiting-room were that of a dentist. "They're before me," I mused from time to time, "but I do hope that when they are shown in His Excellency will say 'Nothing doing'—which is not very far from the Italian expression *far*

niente though not used in quite so *dolce* a way, as a rule. Can they——” I wondered, “be armament manufacturers?” But no; I glanced at them unobtrusively, and concluded that they didn’t look anything like rich enough for that. On the other hand it seemed to be unlikely that two salesmen of agricultural machinery (which I thought, since I had never seen one, they might possibly be) would be awaiting an audience with the Dictator. “Anyhow,” I determined after another side-long look at their faces, “I’ll swear they are not authors, not even popular ones, whatever they are!” With increasing frequency and poignancy I wished that I had brought a book by Mr. Wodehouse to while away the time.

However, time passed, as is its habit. A grave official arrived and conducted the two salesmen of harvesters through a side door and I settled down for a further long wait. Only a minute or two more and the pair came back for their hats and were shown out. “Perhaps,” I began to reflect, surprised at this brevity of reception, “they only wanted his autograph, after all,” but further speculation was cut short by the grave one, who returned, said: “The Duce will see you now,” led me out, showed me through a door, closed it, and left me standing.

Everybody who has ever enjoyed an audience with Signor Mussolini must have felt the same first shock at the vastness and severity of that long, many-windowed apartment. I felt as small as a mouse in a cathedral, though the mouse would not have had my added discomfort of feeling certain that I should fall down, in

involuntary and overdone obeisance, on the polished marble floor. There, at the far end of the long bare salon, unadorned by any paintings, very cold to the eye, was a single desk and a small dark figure bending over papers. My feet, as I walked delicately up the slippery distance, made a loud ringing sound. "Dear, dear!" I thought, "how embarrassing is the spurious concentration of the Great, which I have often met with in statesmen elsewhere." As I approached he sprang up—looking much smaller in morning coat and politician's collar than he does in uniform—and advanced towards me with outstretched hands, and the rather baleful look which is familiar in the public prints.

I sat down opposite him. "Would you rather talk English or French?" he asked in English. "French," I replied in French, having heard, quite correctly, that he was very fluent in that language. Still stern and rigid, he asked one or two conventional questions, but, the moment we got going, all the apparently histrionic exterior was discarded like a glove, and for the rest of the time he was natural, vigorously animated, eloquent and extraordinarily quick; he moved from mood to mood and from jest to earnest.

Politics naturally had to be touched on first, particularly as there was supposed to be an especially serious international crisis: he talked with remarkable frankness and sense about foreign affairs; and as for his domestic régime he summarized his exposition with the remark, made with an engaging smile: "*Moi, je suis démocrate, comme Jules César.*" He asked, with obvious genuineness, what was thought about him in England, and at one

point threw out the question: "Do you think we are a living people or a museum?"

"Both," I replied, noting here a probable key to his career. But the word "museum" reminded me of what I had wanted to hear him talk about. "How are the diggings going on at Herculaneum?" I asked.

Any illusion I may have had that he would not be familiar with the details of excavation was soon dispelled. He passed from Herculaneum (mentioning the chance of discovering lost classical manuscripts there), he described the discoveries at Ostia, he mentioned about a dozen Latin cities (which I had never heard mentioned since I last read Livy) as suitable places for later digging, and then he began to talk about his particular favourites—the diggings and clearances at Rome, in which important relics of the Empire have been unearthed at the expense of some of the remains of the Middle Ages. He suddenly brought me up abruptly by asking: "Did you hear about the Vestal Virgin's grave last week?" I said No, and he at once described the discovery of the interment. "And in her arms she had a wooden model of the baby she could never bear; isn't that touching?" I said it was, very, and he repeated his question, much more emphatically, until, I suppose, the right tinge of emotion came into my voice.

It was getting late. At a convenient pause I rose. He walked to the door with me. I said: "It was extremely kind of you to see me; you must be tired." He gazed at me with determination: "I—I am never tired," he growled, as though resenting a charge. Can this be true of anybody?

At the door he said: "Send me one of your books." I felt disappointed; the hollow compliment seemed unworthy of so real a person. When the man I had first seen greeted me and hoped I had had an enjoyable conversation, I replied: "Most varied and interesting, but I wish he hadn't told me to send him a book he will never open." The secretary looked pained. "No," he protested, "he doesn't ask for books he won't read." . . .

To all this the major in the Salisbury hotel listened attentively. When I had finished he was silent for some seconds and then said: "Well, I daresay he's a very pleasant fellow, since you say so; but why does he go about with that scowl on? What about a glass of sherry before you take the road?"

"It might help to console us about the international situation," I said; so we had our glass of sherry.

When I was paying my bill I remembered an old intention of visiting the local museum, repository of many finds from the Plain and (I believe) the skeleton of a Giant. But no; I was not meant to see local museums; this happened to be the day the museum was shut. Mildly exasperated I thought I would get out of the town at once. I had half a mind to cut south-west to Broadchalke and the high downs. But I hadn't been there since Maurice Hewlett died there. I stayed there often with him in his old monastic building with the clear, weedy, chalk-stream full of small trout rippling along the bottom of the garden; the little fountain enclosed by cypresses to remind him of Tuscany; the small bridges across the stream; the quiet library where he wrote standing up at a lectern; and where I had sat up late

while he and Robert Bridges had hammered at each other about æsthetics in a charming conversation of which I only remember Hewlett saying to him: "If you think that, you think damn nonsense, my dear chap," and receiving a blunt *tu quoque*. The books—he had some fine early things and a great collection of early chroniclers with whom he had lived in his mediæval (or, as he called it, "tushery") period—are all scattered. Strangers, I suppose, are living there now. I wonder if they take those long walks through the lovely outskirts of Cranborne Chase that we used to take, or know the empty house we came on in the woods, or (inspired by the lynchets on the sunny slopes of the down) try as he tried to grow English white wine, only to find all the bottles blowing to pieces just as he was going to drink it, or live passionately with the remote past of that very old country, with Saxon, Roman, and the men who worked the flints? Better not go there, I thought; it would be rather like visiting a graveyard. So I decided to go westward by the road through Wilton, and let chance lead me. It would probably mean Shaftesbury.

"Not a bad idea either," I reflected, as, under a menacing sky, I walked through the outskirts of the city. Shaftesbury, in a way, is disappointing; though it is full of churches and taverns, the chief ingredients of all noble towns, most of the buildings are not very old and not very beautiful. If one sees it from the plain, set high on its hill like a town of Umbria or Provence, one feels that only a dream city imagined by Mr. Frederick Griggs could do justice to the site. When one is in it one finds pleasant enough Georgian buildings but not pinnacles,

bastions, buttresses, archways and arcades of ancient stone that should really be there. No; the two great things about Shaftesbury are the superb view from the terraced eminence—a great expanse of country which De Wint or Wilson Steer might have painted—and the Largest Sideboard in England.

It was that sideboard I thought of chiefly as I stepped westward to Shaston. It was some years since I had last made a pilgrimage to that sideboard, and, though Becket's shrine at Canterbury was doubtless finer in some ways, it can hardly have been much larger. It stands in the first-floor dining-room of the Grosvenor Hotel and nearly fills one long wall. It was carved (by a Swiss, I think) in the early eighteenth century, and was shown in the Great Exhibition. The whole front is covered with sanguinary battle-scenes in high relief, bearded and mailed mercenaries hacking and hewing each other in thousands: it might have been the father and mother of all the Victorian carvings, bronzes and ivory plaques. It is a monstrosity that no passing of the years will ever make anything else; but it is a monument of human patience and skill without taste, and produces a mixture of awe and amusement which is poignantly pleasant. Yes, mused I, the Shaftesbury Sideboard; and, if it rains, I will sit in front of it and contemplate those Teutonic ritters, stilled in their frenzies like the people on Keats's Urn.

"If it rains": I had just, at about eleven-thirty, got to the parting of the ways before Wilton and the gates of the great house when a heavy drop fell on my nose and another on my neck. It began to pelt, and cursing at

having to undo my neatly-strapped bundle in order to get at my mackintosh cape, I was just getting my arms out of the straps when a car stopped in front of me. It was the most dilapidated Austin Seven I had ever seen. The front door was pushed open and an elderly weather-beaten parson's face was pushed out.

"Wouldn't you like to come in out of the rain?"

"Thank you very much——"—and I did.

"Which way are you going?"

"I really don't know. Almost anywhere—really."

"Can I give you a lift?"

"That would be extraordinarily kind of you, so long as you aren't going due east."

"Would it help you if I dropped you in the middle of the Plain?"

The rain was coming down in sheets. I thought I'd stick to the temporary shelter and find out later where I was to be deposited; the sideboard, the Cerne Abbas Giant, Portland Bill, Egdon Heath and all the other temptations in the south-westerly direction could wait to see me another time. Several flashes of lightning, more torrents, and with the water pouring down the wind-screen we set off on the road that leads north-west up the Wylve valley: a new road to me, though I knew both ends of it.

By this time I had noticed three things about my companion. One was that his rugged face had known tropic suns. Another was that his pipe had seen long service. And the third was that on his ancient hat there were those strings which are worn only by the upper ranks of the ecclesiastical profession. We were both of us rather shy for the first few minutes, and after we had both

acutely observed that it was very wet, silence fell upon us, as we sped away from the English Channel, my destination, towards the Bristol Channel, which was once apostrophized by Mrs. Yearsley, the Bristol milkwoman poet, with "Hail, useful Channel!" After a while I felt it would be mannerly of me to break the ice, so I said: "Excuse me, sir, but are you a bishop?"

"Yes," he replied, "that is to say, I was."

"Colonial?"

"British Bongoland."

"Is there a nice cathedral there?"

"Not at all bad."

"It's in Edwardstown, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Very few white people there, I imagine?"

"About seventy."

"Were all your choristers negroes?"

"Yes."

"Many earthquakes when you were there?"

"Some."

"How's mahogany?"

"Bad."

"How's coffee?"

"Bad."

"Rubber down, too?"

"Yes."

We rattled on through the moisture; I could remember nothing further about the industries of Bongoland, and my thoughts strayed to the Monosyllabic Friars in Rabelais. Suddenly we slowed up. There was a little inn with no other houses near; it bore the name of some

unusual bird, as it might be the Dodo. "Visiting the sick," I thought to myself, and I said: "Parishioner?" "No," replied the bishop, shutting off the engines, "but I never pass this place without going in for a Guinness. Do you mind?"

"I think I'll join you," I answered, rejoicing in the rare opportunity of being led astray by a bishop. We went into the bar, the bishop hailed the landlord, who was discussing with two shepherds the effect of too much rain on potatoes, two Guinnesses were ordered, the right reverend gentleman refilled his pipe, and then, noticing the bandage on my hand, he said: "Hullo, cut your finger?" I told him that I had been damaged by a fast bowler and that my finger felt as though it would always be swollen and crooked. "I expect it will," said the bishop cheerfully; then, holding out a gnarled handful of fingers, added: "Wicket-keeping." "Bongoland?" I asked. "No," said he, "Tasmania and Saskatchewan"; then, before I had time to enquire about the chronological side of his travels, he surprisingly asked me if I knew anything about church plate, proceeding to inform me about Diocesan Surveys of such things now in process. Patens and chalices at one corner of the bar, potatoes at the other; Hudson's Bay and Australia at one corner, at the other, Wiltshire.

The bishop looked at his watch. "Would it be all right if I dropped you at Wyllye?" he enquired. "Perfect," I said. "You see," he explained, "when I get there I have to turn east towards Amesbury." "That's all right, thanks very much," I said, and we resumed our drive. It poured incessantly, and it was still pouring when he

drew up at the "Bell" at Wylye, the capital of the Plain, shook hands, raised his hat and left me.

I had some bread and cheese, put on my mackintosh cape which just came down to my knees, and started along the up-and-down road which runs for a dozen miles from Wylye to Mere, where the Plain ends. On a fine day it would have been better to leave the road and take the ridges, but visibility was bad, and I had no desire to get lost in the wet. There was little traffic; a car every quarter of an hour came out of the weeping road behind, and moaned away into the distance ahead. Copses and eminences which had tempted me to idle long since were not to be explored: "*patulæ recubans sub tegmine fagi*" was not for to-day nor teaching the woods to ring with Amaryllis's name. In such weather, when one's hat drips and the bottom of one's waterproof flaps loaded with water against one's trousers, and one's smoke will not keep alight, walking, with several hours in front of one, is a drudgery. Once only there was a thing I remember. Suddenly at a rise I heard a tinkle to my left, and there on a top of down, silhouetted like shadows against the grey skyless world, there was a long frieze—sheep, a few cattle, a dog and two men, which came and passed into obscurity. "Larger than human" it all looked, and the shepherds' heads were bowed; melancholy stirred in my heart and for some time I walked on without noticing where I was. The sheep had brought to my mind a memory of the picture "Love among the Ruins"; "the quiet coloured end of evening" and the sheep tinkling homeward in the twilight. I was far away in Italy. I saw across the Wiltshire rain that part of the Campagna

which you cross when you come to Rome by road from Viterbo, and which surprises one by sudden little corners, dingle and cottage and stream, which might be Devonshire; and the plain south of Rome where the arches of the great aqueducts stride to the Alban Hills; and the marshy wilderness behind the coast north of Ostia, where great birds flap out of the desolation and the air swarms with noxious insects. And then in my mind I did many journeys again. I saw Florence from a terrace at Settingnano and watched the sunset fade and the lights come out; and Assisi from Perugia with one shaft of radiance gleaming on it out of a black thunderous sky; and Orvieto on its great crag; and the flag of flame above Stromboli at night streaming across the dark waters; and the church at Murano with the smoky Bellini; and the Giorgione at Castel Franco high in the hills; and the spectral mystery of Malcontenta, where the beautiful lady was imprisoned and died, and haunts the gardens at twilight in the manner of a poem by Poe. The horn of a car blew behind me and I got out of the way.

It was six o'clock when I came down into Mere, where are a fine church tower and two old coaching inns. I found the one best known to me much modernized, with a new lounge, a *table d'hôte* and waiters in white coats: I can dispense with all that, but I can only suppose that the modern motor-tourist likes it. I did not want soup or fish: I had an immense plate of cold beef, with which I was persuaded, in the absence of pickled cabbage, to take pickled onions. It was the first time in my life, and very likely the last.

In bed that night, and early, at another inn where I

met a man with a couple of greyhounds who asked me out duck-shooting on the morrow, I was reading Edward Hutton's *Highways and Byways of Somerset* which I had found lying about; a beautiful and learned book, by a man who was at Blundells just before me, the style seemingly influenced by Mr. Belloc, but that is no bad thing. Every page was starred with landscapes and buildings which I wanted to see again. Why not, I wondered, cut south again towards Crewkerne, and revisit the tombs of the Pouletts at Hinton St. George, an overwhelming muster of marbles and alabasters, armours and wigs which has few rivals but those of the Bolingbrokes at Lydiard Tregoze and those of the Russells, so severely barred off at Chenies? Or what about finding again that panorama from a crest which I once came across on a small road somewhere south of Langport and Somerton—sunshine, harvesting on the hill-top, and endless miles of fields and woods far below—a prospect which I have never been able to rediscover? Or I might even go to that other little town, where in a simple inn I slept long ago, and where I met a young barmaid who was fluent in ancient Greek (after taking her degree she had decided that a country barmaid's life was livelier than a schoolmistress's) and who, when I asked her for a book to take to bed, presented me with Trevelyan's *Early Life of Charles James Fox*. But no, I sighed, she's sure to have moved by now. Then a drawing of that noble thing, the Pulteney Bridge, settled it: I would go to Bath; and if the weather was still foul or the journey over twenty miles, I would take a bus or even stop at Frome.

Bath was due north; hardly on the way to Devonshire. However, by and large Somerset really was west of Wiltshire and marched with Devon, so I was moving on in a sense. Besides, I wanted to go to Bath, and why shouldn't I? With an extraordinary sense of new-found and unaccustomed freedom arising from a complete absence of arrangement with others, I decided that I would—unless I changed my mind in the morning. I shut the book, blew out the light and began to luxuriate in memories of "the English Florence."

"How long is it since I was there? Imagine letting five years go by without seeing Bath!" True, Chivers and George Saintsbury would no longer be there, and it wouldn't be quite the same thing; but the more I thought about it the more I was inclined once more to survey from Beechen Cliff that august amphitheatre, with its belfries clustering in the valley and its crescents climbing the hills: with eyes averted as far as possible from the modern red rash by Lansdowne. But five years?—no, I had forgotten, it was less than three years since I had been there, but then, that hadn't really been a visit to Bath but a gastronomic pilgrimage to Horace Vachell's lovely old manor just outside it and to Harveys' at Bristol.

It was a pious visit by certain members of the Saintsbury Club: André Simon, Colonel Ian Campbell, A. J. A. Symons and myself. At Bath we established contact with Evan Morgan, who was at that moment staying in a hotel, and whom we found in a vast room of which the windows were sealed and the floor covered with newspapers because he was travelling with a flock

of small birds—there may have been some fish as well, but I don't remember. We dined in the evening with Vachell, a prince of connoisseurs, and next day went on to Bristol, where the Harvey family gave lunch to us and two or three of their friends. What a place! The cellars of these most ancient wine-merchants were once part of a mediæval monastery, and are still labelled "Crypt 1," "Crypt 2," and so on. The old panelled dining-room made a perfect setting for a lunch of which the central feature was a saddle of Southdown, and of which the wine list was composed of a series of clarets, including several of the '70's, some of them so rare as to be no longer in the market. We tried them all, and in the end voted on them by ballot without previous discussion; there was almost unanimity in the votes as to order of merit, and the Laffittes led easily; and before we parted we drank the memory of the author of *Notes on a Cellar Book*, not to mention *A History of Prosody* and a hundred other works, as it is drunk at every dinner of the Club in London.

That was a man: one of the race of great professors. Bath knew only his later years. After a lusty life as scholar, teacher, combative Tory journalist, universal devourer of books and wine-drinker, he had to retire, on an age-limit, from his Edinburgh professorship just after the war broke out. His huge library was sold for very little, and he retired to a basement in Royal Crescent, with a bedridden wife, a small fraction of his books, failing health, very little money, and doctor's orders to drink nothing but champagne—which meant, thenceforth, total abstinence. His wife died and he was left

alone. For a year or two he was still able to walk about the streets. I remember Edmund Gosse (who had had some kind of feud with him) sitting on his balcony over Regent's Park and saying to me: "We were in Bath last week and a polar bear passed me in the street." "Really!" I exclaimed. "Yes," he said, "when it came quite close I saw it was George Saintsbury." He was white and stooped, and I suppose much bemuffled and begloved; but indoors he was too frail to remind one of bears, and his last years, after he had fallen in the street from vertigo, were spent entirely indoors.

Never did I know lonely old age and its ailments more bravely borne. There in his little basement study he would sit, black skull-cap, weak spectacled eyes, bulbous veined nose, thinned white beard, gnarled hands—looking, as an American friend* whom I took to see him remarked, "a mixture between the Rabelaisian and the Rabbinical." When well over eighty his enthusiasm for literature, great and small, was as ardent as ever: to hear him talk about Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott, or indeed almost anybody, with his vast relish for character and memory for detail, to see his weak old eyes glitter and hear his high chuckle of glee, was to feel a Laodicean and ashamed.

His modesty was equal to his courtesy, which was gallant. Once Sir George Chrystal (who had been one of his pupils) and I went to Bath to sound him about a

*The American friend rewarded me later by taking me late at night, through woods full of the croaking of frogs, to see red wine bottled in the cellar of a seventeenth-century farmhouse in New York State when "Prohibition" was in its heyday. It was drinkable wine, carefully binned by vintages; and there, by a lantern's light, George Saintsbury's health was also pledged. I do not think that our farmer host knew much about the subject of the toast, but he obviously wished him well.

testimonial on his eightieth birthday. First, when he thought we wanted to do something for himself, he refused point-blank. Then, when he was reluctantly brought to see that people wanted to commemorate him, he said very emphatically that he did not want people, for his sake, to subscribe to anything useful, least of all scholarships, of which there were sufficient already. By degrees we worked the conversation round to a portrait for his old college at Oxford, and he ridiculed the idea that his college could possibly want to remember him. In the end William Nicholson painted a magnificent portrait, and it hangs in Merton now.

Another honour was offered him which no pressure could induce him to take. Bath is a city which is very chary about conferring its Freedom upon anybody: it will hardly sink below the level of a Prince of Wales. For some years after the war the perpetual Mayor (had he been still alive he might have been still mayor) was Cedric Chivers. He was scarcely a literary man, though the friend of many a one; and he rejoiced in two direct connections with literature in that he did wholesale bookbinding for public libraries and that his Mayoress, in his widowerhood, was Madame Sarah Grand, authoress of *The Heavenly Twins*. He showered treasures on the town, he was a magpie for gathering facts about its social and architectural history, and he thought it was only right and proper that all eminent persons should come to live at Bath when in retirement. So one day it "came to him in a flash" that George Saintsbury, being at the moment the city's chief ornament (intellectually, at all events), should be made a Freeman

of Bath. "Preliminary soundings" were taken by myself. The old man was deeply grateful, but he couldn't leave his dwelling, disclaimed deserts, and probably detested the notion of accepting the honour unless he could go through the necessary ceremonies and celebrations. So Bath's Roll lost a good signature—why Saintsbury's name was never suggested for the O.M. is another matter.

But Cedric Chivers! What a character that was! He had gone to America young, made a fortune out of patent binding machines, returned and built a model factory on the northern heights above Bath, near the Lansdown Cricket Ground. To go over his works with him was a pleasure: all the girls seemed to regard him as an uncle. He supported every sort of charity and gave every sort of public entertainment, but his chief pleasure lay in collecting and showing his friends his extraordinary jumble of works of art. His last house, though substantial and stone-built, was small (he had given his large one to some cause), with a pleasant garden sloping towards the town. The garden was adorned by ornamental fishponds, statues, and a long wooden concert-cum-dining room, and the house was crowded with oil-paintings, water-colours, prints, china, book-cases, bronzes, busts, snuff-boxes and every kind of bijouterie. Some were good, some were very bad: his love for them all (especially for those which were the work of friends) was such that the guest would have been a prig and a cad who did not, at whatever sacrifice of principles and canons, lie roundly and profess a hearty admiration for the whole lot. He was small, grey,

noustached, bright-eyed, birdlike, active and chattering; and when once at his house his attention was divided between supplying one with cigars and refreshments and displaying his treasures. The apples of his eye were certain books which he had had made, partly because they were as marvellous as things should be on which no money had been spared, and partly to demonstrate that, although he supplied Public Libraries with cheap bindings by the ton, he was really a lover of binding as an art. They were elaborately tooled in gold; portraits were let into panels on the covers; the pages were adorned with water-colours of knights and undines and sylphs and innocent children in pale pink and blue—and he admired the artists employed on them as though they had been Derômes and Burne-Joneses. Next to these his chief delight was a light silver filigree box from the lid of which, when a button was pressed, an emerald bird sprang forth and circled and rapidly twittered in soprano, then going back with a sudden snap. It was a very pretty thing. Once, thought Chivers, it may have belonged to Marie Antoinette; later it certainly belonged to Mr. G. K. Chesterton.

Amongst his countless hospitalities was an annual entertainment to a touring cricket team. For many years in August, Clifford Bax used to take some fifteen people westward for a fortnight: Bath was used as a headquarters, and matches (when the rain permitted) were played against the local sides and against the elevens of towns and villages all around, such as Devizes, Chippenham, Melksham, Trowbridge, Lacock and Box—the village sides usually being the most difficult ones to beat.

Nothing can have been more agreeable than these tours.

For one thing, the players were convivial, intelligent and mixed; when off the field musicians like Arnold Bax, Armstrong Gibbs and Julius Harrison, and writers like the captain, Alec Waugh and Ralph Straus were active with pen and piano. For another, the cricket, though not all the best performers were eminent in the arts (or, so to speak, vice versa), was lively and good. And, for another, the country was perfect from a touring side's point of view; hilly, well-wooded, and covered with ancient things, so that an early start and a detour could easily secure a visit to a mediæval inn, to the Saxon church at Bradford or, as once happened, to dear old Lord Methuen's collection of pictures at Corsham, whilst any Sunday could take one to the riches of the Cotswolds. The opposing sides were the right kind of people, and some of the grounds were beautifully situated—especially that rustic field at Lacock, where fauna of all sorts, from donkeys to geese, used to graze, and behind which lay a long line of peaceful old buildings dominated by the church spire of one of the loveliest little towns in all England. It is off the track, it has not changed for centuries, it was beautifully laid out in a rectangle with delicious side alleys, and on its flank is the Abbey where Talbot started photography, and in the crypt of which is a gigantic bronze bowl made by an Italian in the fifteenth century, not to mention innumerable bats.

Every year, to this combination, Cedric Chivers gave at least one entertainment, flowing with the milk of

human kindness and much else. In dinner clothes and blazers we drove up to his house and a long evening in his garden room—the garden itself being festooned with fairy-lamps, red, green, yellow and blue, the very fishpond having coloured lights beneath the water, and necklaces of light glittering from the terraces of Bath far below. Sometimes he had extra guests. Once it was old F. E. Weatherley, then eighty.

This charming and simple old man is, I suppose, now fading from memory. He came from North Devon, practised at the local bar, and took silk at an advanced age; but he was known in every villa of the suburbs and provinces as an incredibly prolific writer of lyrics for drawing-room songs, his only rival being his much weaker contemporary Clifton Bingham. Sea-songs, patriotic songs, love-songs, songs about roses in gardens, songs about Devon and Somerset, farmers and fishermen, they were all one to him: his collected poems would be awe-inspiring. His writing life reached far back to the days when all England languished in the evenings to the strains of Tosti and Pinsuti, Blumenthal and Löhr, and he was still active when he died, about ten years ago. A neat, chubby little rodent of a man, he was, at first, rather reticent in the company of boisterous juniors, all strange to him. But somebody remembered one of his songs, which must be fifty years old, called "Nancy Lee," and boldly asked him to sing it. A bardic fire flashed from his eyes and, on request, he piped it twice with a lusty chorus; he was a happy man for the rest of the evening and died within a twelvemonth. I think it was the last time Chivers was host that he did things on a

grander scale, and took a large banqueting room and asked scores of people in honour of T. P. O'Connor, who had many interests, though cricket was probably not one of them.

A night or two afterwards I spent one of the oddest evenings of my life. Another man and I stayed on in Bath, and my eldest son also happened to be there; a message came from T. P., who was staying at the Grand Pump-Room Hotel, asking us to come over after dinner. When we got to his private sitting-room we found him with Lord Harris: the incongruity of the pair, although they had age and long political experience in common, was startling—but they had both taken their aged bones to Bath and come together, the impish Irish journalist with his shapeless face and sly eyes, and the tall, austere, aquiline, bewhiskered, correct cricketer and Indian governor. Lord Harris, who at nearly eighty had recently been making runs and taking wickets on the Fourth of June at Eton, welcomed every attempt to turn the conversation to cricket or imperial history, but T. P. was too much for him and for some hours monopolized the talk with reminiscences of Victorian worthies of the Jubilee Plunger type, and stories of the what-the-lady's-husband-said-to-the-duke sort, relating to past ornaments of Burke. Now and again, as he produced an especially impudent piece of ancient scandal, he turned with his brogue and said: "Ye'll remember that, Lord Harris?" Lord Harris was the perfect gentleman, and perhaps he was really enjoying the relaxation from decorum; but his nods of assent were of the slightest and his smiles had a trace of effort in them. It was rather

as though an Archbishop should have found himself supping with the chorus, and was making the best of it. How much truth there was in T. P.'s stories I never could guess. He was the most incorrigible gossip I ever knew; and yet, when he was libelling the dead most outrageously, there never seemed to be any malice in him. He liked people and collected them and stories about them: in his own house, where he was a very gay host, he assembled the most extraordinarily variegated parties and managed to fuse them by his sheer common humanity. . . .

All gone, and irrecoverable. But Bath it should be; and with the rain pattering on the windows, I turned over.

SIXTH DAY

“BANG!”

The noise awoke me. I saw the wraith of a maid, and heard her say “Bath.”

“No,” I said, muzzily, “it can’t be——” and then realized that she wished to know when I wanted one. . . .

The rain had rained itself out and the morning was fresh and sunny as, after an examination of the map, I paid my bill and strolled into the bar to say good-bye to the landlord, of whom I had had a bare glimpse the night before, as I was tired and had had a drenching. “Glass of beer to set you on the road, sir?” he asked.

I was having it with him, and hearing what the *Daily Express* had to say about Foreign Affairs, when (the hour being now half-past ten) a car suddenly braked to a standstill outside the door, and a young man and a young woman, in their early twenties, poured in and demanded two gin and Frenches. The young man was short and slight, with innocent eyes, hollow pale cheeks, a little fair moustache, a khaki mackintosh, and, just visible behind the upturned collar, a tie which I diagnosed as Old Merchant Taylors or near it. The girl was the female of the species—fair, rosy, lipsticked and clad in a red oil-skin which would have put a pillar-box to the blush.

He was called George; she was called Olga; they were going from Weymouth to Bristol, and had started early;

and the old "Morris" was running like a hare. This much, from their chatter to each other and the landlord, I learned within a minute; and within two minutes I had politely refused more refreshment, the young woman had gone upstairs to powder her nose, and I had learned that they were engaged. The young man was going strong with the landlord on the invention of an ideal England XI, when the girl reappeared, stared at me strangely, stepped up to me, hesitated, then asked me if I were myself.

"Yes," I said, "but what made you think that?"

"Oh," she replied, "I just noticed your name in the register. Besides, I once heard you make a speech."

"Where was that?"

"At an English Association meeting. I was at college then. I did so want to ask you a question afterwards."

"Why didn't you?"

"I felt so shy."

"Well, ask me now."

I spoke, I hope, with due gallantry, but my heart sank within me. I knew what was coming. I have not yet been on Greenland's icy mountains, in spite of a kind invitation from Mr. Augustine Courtauld, whom I have forgotten to ask about the literary fashions there prevailing. I have not been on India's coral strand, nor have my nostrils snuffed the spicy breezes of Ceylon's isle. But I am sure it would be just the same there as in Somerset: for in Paris and Cairo, and Haifa, Rhodes, and Copenhagen, in the Town Hall of Helsingfors and on the Pine Valley Golf Course in New Jersey, I have heard that question asked and, somehow, seen it coming.

It came: "Did you know D. H. Lawrence well?" and once more I had to answer: I corresponded with him a bit but only met him once, and that was in 1913. It was in somebody's Chelsea garden. Other people talked. He gloomed all the time. His face was shadowy; he looked impressive and ill.

The next question was about to follow when George, tossing off his drink and saying "Well, cheerio!" to the landlord, turned, rubbed his hands briskly and said: "Well, old girl, I think we'd better be moving along." "Do stop a moment, I must introduce you," exclaimed his fiancée. "Old friends, what?" he began. The introduction was made; we shook hands. "Hiking, what?" said George. "Well, walking——" I said.

The girl suggested that they should take me to Bath. I split the difference with my not very exacting pedestrian conscience and said that I should be grateful if they would drop me at the entrance to Frome. The girl told the young man that I was going in the back seat with her. This happened; and off we went.

There was no looking out of the window. Literary conversation must have been scarce in the maiden's home-circle, whether at Weymouth or Bristol, and she eagerly got in as many questions as she could in the time. The questions were none of them abstract: second-hand contact with esteemed personalities was what was wanted, and with as many of them as possible. I admitted my various degrees of acquaintanceship with Mr. T. S. Eliot, Mrs. Woolf, Mr. Aldous Huxley, several Sitwells, and various devastating and daring young authors of both sexes. I felt happy when I was able to

claim old friendship, and unkind and mean when I had to throw a cold douche on her enthusiasm by confessing that I hardly knew the people or even, as happened with some poets, that I had not yet had the privilege of meeting them at all.

Her tastes and knowledge—though I doubted whether she had more than dipped into her authors—were emphatically contemporary. I felt that it would be a mistake to try to be polite by talking about Hardy, Conrad, or Augustine Birrell: I should have been greeted, as sometimes before, by the sort of puzzled stare which would also have greeted me if I had told her the joke which Charles Lamb made to me in the Temple over the whist-table (though that, of course, was before the war) or (but that also was before the war) what the Duke of Wellington said to me on the field of Waterloo. The catechism failed. There was a pause. We both looked out of the window at the hedges hurrying back.

She had been meditating. Looking straight ahead, and with a slight trembling in her voice, she said: "Did you know Rupert Brooke?"

"Very well," I said; and I knew she was now speaking of a poet whom she had read and loved as a girl before she took up with the intellectual life. "What was he like?" she asked, as I was wondering where to begin. There suddenly came into my mind the silly reactions of fashion, the current jealousy of people who had hearts and died in the war, the smiling denigration by living dogs (some of whom knew Brooke), of dead lions, and I said angrily: "A damn nice man, damn good-looking, not a bit girlish, and would have been a damn good

poet if he'd lived!" She looked surprised. I simmered down, and told her, rather jerkily, as the car bumped along the road, what came into my mind as I focused my eyes on the driver's back.

I had, I told her, first met Rupert in Green Street, Cambridge; and last, just before he sailed for the Dardanelles. . . .

* * * * *

"You're sure we can't take you on to Bath?" asked the girl as we drew up on the outskirts of Frome. "Quite certain, thank you," I said. "It's quite a pleasant walk from here. Good-bye. I hope we shall meet again." Off they went, but for a quarter of an hour I lingered. I was looking for something which I did not find.

Near Frome is Mells. Years ago, when that tall, grand, handsome, white-bearded old man Sir John Horner was alive, I turned up there for a week-end with a picture. I had picked it up in a "junk-shop" at Plymouth while changing trains; it was a lovely Italian lake-scene by Richard Wilson, and later on shown at the Tate Gallery when they had a Wilson Memorial Exhibition. Conversation naturally turned to the subject of picking up masterpieces, and Lady Hornertold me that the late Sir Hugh Lane had laid the foundations of his career by picking up a blackened Romney in Frome. Returning thus, I thought I would look around Frome to see if there were another Romney. A shop, but not the old shop, with some pictures I did find, and some of them were black enough, in all conscience. There were some pudding-faced Georgian portraits. But there was nothing I wanted to buy.

Why should there be? Well, although it is said daily in the book and picture worlds that the day of bargains and discoveries is over, I don't believe it. Fashions change, pictures get dirty, fakes multiply so much that genuine things are suspected, hundreds of auctions take place daily all over Britain in which "pictures by or attributed to" anybody from Raphael to Sidney Cooper are exposed for sale, most of the owners, auctioneers and local dealers know very little—and a little knowledge is worse than none in such matters—about works of art; while, though the London men have their agents (whatever the intuition or connoisseurship of most of these may be like) on the road, they cannot be in all the shops all the time. And pictures are easier to come by than books: any bookseller can read a title-page or a colophon, but how many provincial furniture dealers (to take the most extremely identifiable style as an instance) would know a grubby or even a clean El Greco if they saw one? Hunting for pictures requires free movement in time and space and that is what most of us cannot get. Perhaps if I could have stayed in Frome for a month something might have turned up. But that's the catch.

As I left Frome and began to walk up the valley I thought again about the conversation in the car and wondered what would have happened had Rupert and all those others survived the war, or if there had been no war to survive. Would the fashion for eccentricity in the arts have gone to such lengths, and would the papers have been full of praises of poets who seem not to write for the ear at all? Nobody could prove anything, I reflected, but the fact that one generation does

influence the next must mean that a generation missing makes a difference. But the thing, I thought again, is world-wide and began before: so perhaps we were, anyhow, in for an Age, which would, at the peril of having its works rapidly outmoded, make literature the servant of doctrine more thoroughly than ever. In two respectable papers I had just seen two determined young reviewers denouncing one poet for still hankering after Beauty and applauding another because his work, at any rate, wasn't emotional. All this can lead to is a small public getting the dry unmelodious, intellectual husks it wants, the great public consoling itself with "Annie Laurie," and the hungry sheep in between, who are anxious to be up with the times and look for guidance where there is none, pretending to admire what it does not admire, affecting that the darkest and craggiest passages of Donne are sublime, and reading Shakespeare's songs in secret.

But as I walked along this gentle serene morning in that sequestered country unfevered by metropolitan debates, I remembered a discussion some years before the war, or, rather, a monologue by T. E. Hulme, who was killed in the war and also knew Brooke. Hulme, a huge, ham-faced, idle man, but one of great wit and lightning intellect, was at St. John's in my time, was sent down with the longest mock funeral ever seen in the town, and, after a few years, reappeared in London as king of a weekly *salon* held in the fine drawing-room of a friend's house in Soho which used to be the Venetian embassy. Large numbers of people—writers, painters, philosophers, patrons—used to assemble there and smoke

and drink liqueurs; while Hulme, as massive as Johnson but a non-smoker and a teetotaller, consumed sweets, argued with anybody who was willing to cope with him, or soliloquized on almost any theme, ancient or modern. Sometimes he talked great sense, sometimes great nonsense: when it was nonsense he was fully aware of the fact, but not all his listeners were. Always his talk was fluent, well shaped, subtle, various in allusion, full of illuminating simile; he was combative, fiery-tempered, intolerant of those who crossed him, catholic otherwise in his tastes in friends, an utter individualist in his habits, and afraid of nobody. As I say, he was idle: a few papers remain, and he translated, with some collaboration from me, one small book by Bergson, and one by Georges Sorel, who greatly influenced Mussolini and, incidentally, diagnosed in the exiled young revolutionary the fervent nationalist which Mussolini later became. He also wrote about six small unrhymed poems as protests against woolliness and inexactitude. I had forgotten them until the other day when I saw that some solemn young man, at whom he would have jeered, had been alluding to him as "that important poet," and all I can recall of them are three phrases:

"Thine old star-eaten blanket of the sky."

"A tap of gold heels on the pavement hard."

"The moon looked over the hedge
Like a red-faced farmer."

At all events, whatever he was talking about, specialists and practising artists thought him worth listening to. None the less, perhaps because there was, though his

views fluctuated, always behind his thought an endeavour to relate things. He was really a philosopher—which reminds me that, after attending a Philosophical Congress at Bologna, he swore to me that there had been a free fight in the Ethical Section.

Once he was discoursing on the changes in prevailing philosophical theory. He said that all the possible views were always there, like the diverse speakers at Marble Arch, but that the crowd was sometimes around one platform and sometimes around another, illustrating the theory by a disquisition on everybody from Heraclitus onwards.

* * * * *

Through Beckington and Woolverton I walked the six miles or so to Norton St. Philip. It was nearly two when I got to the ‘‘George’’ Inn, one of the unspoilt mediæval inns of England. I refreshed myself, but the man I was looking for I did not find: a truly traditional and contented character. He was a basket-maker on his own, one of the few left—rarer now, I dare say, than the lace-makers in Bucks—and he asked me once if I needed anything in the basket or cradle way. I told him that all I wanted for my purposes was a larger wastepaper-basket than I had ever yet seen. He took the job on. I have it still. It comes up to my waist.

I roamed round the back of the ‘‘George’’ to have another look at the turret staircase in the mellow golden stone of these parts, which might have come from the back-premises of a cathedral, and then went

on. I spoke to no one and I did not, as I had hoped, pass a cricket match in being.

So, by way of the road that leads over Beechen Cliff, I came down into Bath. When the city first came into sight, below my feet, I paused and thought again of the time when, on foot or in a car, alone or in company, there were always two houses I would make for, and now there were none. No welcome. The mood was interrupted by a thought which made me laugh heartily aloud, much to the surprise of a spectacled passer-by who looked like Rudyard Kipling: I remembered what had been the greatest and most unexpected welcome of my life.

It was in April 1933; I was going to Denmark and Sweden to make a few speeches about literature which were intended to promote international friendship. A friend came with me part of the way and we crossed in the steamer from Harwich to Esbjerg; a peaceful journey, and, apparently, no other passengers. When evening fell, on the second day, we went on deck to watch the nearing shore. As we approached the quay-side we became aware, in the light of great white arc-lamps, of multitudes of people packed together and stretching away on either hand as far as the eye could reach, little pink upturned faces like sand on the seashore. I turned to my companion and said: "Dudley, authors don't get a welcome like this in England; these Continental peoples know how to do things." I found there was an eager-looking Danish steward standing next to me and said to him: "What on earth is all this about?"—for by this time a gangway had been thrown from ship to quay, and people looking like a Mayor and Corporation were

standing at the other end of it. "It's the *Railway Queen*," replied the steward, in astonishment. "What *Railway Queen*?" I asked. "Why, your English *Railway Queen*," said he, "she's come over to congratulate the Danish Railways."

We didn't know what it all meant, so we just waited. About twenty minutes passed and all our attempts to leave the ship were baulked. Her Majesty had to come first. At long last there emerged on deck, followed by fathers, brothers and what not, a young girl, with bowed head, clad in a green bespangled dress and a coronet and veil. As she walked down the gangway the crowds cheered, the bands played, and the Mayor began to make a speech. Not until the *Railway Queen* had completed her progress were we allowed into the Customs House to declare nothing at all.

We got to Copenhagen in the morning. An extremely beautiful woman-journalist (if this isn't too much to swallow) met the train and asked me what I thought about Shakespeare and John Galsworthy. I told her about the *Railway Queen*. She said that the *Railway Queen* was the news of the day in Denmark and was going to have a Guildhall luncheon. I said, truly, that I didn't even know there was a *Railway Queen*, let alone knowing whether she was the Queen of one railway, or of all our systems, or who elected her. The interviewer grinned. That evening I saw her again. She said: "Well, I saw the *Railway Queen* and told her you'd never heard of her." "What did she say to that?" I naturally asked. "She said that she'd never heard of you."

That was a blow. However, the lady put things right

next day, for she induced an undergraduate with fair hair, a pleasant smile and a fast car, to drive us out to Elsinore to see Hamlet's grave. Opposite that Hans Andersen castle there is a steep mound, freely sprinkled with tall trees, and on the top of it a vast granite sarcophagus with "Hamlet" incised on it. "This looks to me rather new?" I said. "Oh yes," replied my guide, "it was only put here a few years ago. The innkeeper buried his cat here." "But why," I went on, "did he get the sculptor to carve on it a leopard with a fish's tail?" "Perhaps," she responded brightly, "the cat had a fish's tail." After that I felt I could not cope with the Danes, and contented myself with looking about me; amongst the sights I saw being, from below the battlements, a solitary silhouetted sentinel with an inordinately long rifle and bayonet, keeping watch over the Sound for all the world as though he were a super at the Old Vic. . . .

But I was nearing Bath.

I descended the hill and crossed the railway. Where should I sleep? A walker with a kitbag could obviously not present himself at some of the hotels: the porters and book-keepers would look haughty, and perhaps pretend there was no room; and, even if one forced one's way in, the dinner-jackets and knitting bags would give one disdainful looks over shoulders. I remembered the time in 1923, when a party of us, including A. P. Herbert, in Belloc's aged, and now at last defunct *Nona*—about which he wrote a lovely book—had sailed in rough weather up the Channel, taken a quiet entry into the Solent through the dawn and landed at Ryde, unshaven

and covered with fish-scales (though ready and eager to wash) and presented ourselves for breakfast at the nearest hotel. Foreigners were apparently in charge; pressed white flannels and yachting caps were everywhere in evidence; we were told there was no breakfast going. When the leader of the party made his presence felt and began talking about the laws (he had recently been a legislator) there were rapid conferences, and in the end a compromise was reached: we were given our bacon and eggs, but a screen was put round us (for we had really been sailing) in order that the people with yachting caps should not be contaminated. I did not want that sort of thing, as I was alone and unsupported, to be repeated at Bath. So I went to a humble middle-class hotel, discarded my superfluities in a bedroom, and dined on tomato soup, turbot, roast mutton and prunes and custard. Then I explored the hotel.

There was a large drawing-room with some ladies steadily knitting, but not smoking. I went down a passage and found a small lounge with some commercial travellers in it. It was only nine; why not go out? I got my hat, went to the parapet by the bridge, and looked at the weir in the twilight, turned round by the Abbey and aimlessly examined some second-hand furniture shops and then, somewhere at the back, found myself outside a cosy-looking tavern. I went in.

A plump landlady was sitting and sewing behind the bar. A clock ticked. A forlorn dart-board gazed on clean sawdust. I went up to the counter and ordered a pint of beer. The landlady gave me an old friend's smile and, as she was drawing it, said, "You'll be glad to

hear that Douglas has started on his job." "Rather!" I answered, hastily, hoping she did not observe my start of surprise; and there followed one of those *solvitur loquendo* dialogues in which one has to go carefully for fear of hurting somebody's feelings. I could only suppose—as I put my face in the tankard in order to gain time—that she was mistaking me for somebody else. We all have our doubles. I once met mine in the Strand, and he gave me a very sinister grin, as though to imply that I didn't know what he was letting me in for. Perhaps the wretch was now infesting Bath. "Was it motor-work you said he was going to do?" I asked warily.

"Why no, the railway. Clerk on the railway."

"Let me see, is it seventeen he is now?"

"No, sixteen last birthday; but of course he's big for his age."

"Will you——?"

"Well, just this once. A glass of port, please. Thank you."

"Is Douglas still keen on football?"

"No, it's the music more, now. Always was, really."

"Of course. Wasn't it the accordion?"

"No, never that, but the banjo and the xylophone and the piano."

"I remember now. He was playing once when I came in. Jolly good, wasn't he?"

"He was that! Why, only on Sunday week he played the organ in church! He'd never touched the organ before, and he only played one note wrong!"

"I hope he's going on with it."

"I hope he's not. So does my husband. It would interfere with his career."

"Can't he practise in the evenings?"

"Evening classes for him! He's got his future to think of."

Poor Douglas and his career. I suppose that in ten years' time he will be carefully writing out Season Tickets at Fishguard. But perhaps the goddess will be imperative. He will break loose, all England will know Douglas Something and his Band, his hair will be blue-black and plastered, he will have a wide mouth and large teeth, and as a reward for filling the air with dreadful noises he will draw hundreds of pounds a week and marry an Afghan Princess.

Two more men, obvious familiars, came in. I said: "Good night," and hurried out lest complications about my double should ensue. He might even owe them money.

Up the hill and down: then I went back to the hotel to draw the lounge again. Three travellers were there, as so often in Dickens.

Two of the commercial travellers were not conversable: their backs were turned, brief-cases were beside them, and they were scribbling hard, perhaps to their wives, perhaps to their employers, reporting either progress or the lack of it. I picked up an old *Tatler* and sat down in one of the two wicker chairs in front of the crinkled-paper-stuffed fireplace; there was a small table between me and the third commercial traveller who, a gaunt man with a heavy moustache like Seddon, the murderer, in a desultory way was glancing at the local paper. He

looked at me, as though he wished to speak; I returned his gaze sympathetically and he twiddled a table-bell. A worried waiter came in: "A double-Scotch and a Polly," said the traveller, and to me: "I always believe in a night-cap." "Quite right, too," I agreed, not knowing what else to say. "Had a good day?" "Saturday, you know," he replied, "but not a bad day yesterday. What about you?"

"Not bad," I attempted weakly, realizing that he thought me one of the fraternity. He bubbled the mineral-water into his glass, and waved waiter and tray away. "And what's your line?"

I was rather stuck, and said: "Books."

"Not bad here, I daresay," he nodded, and then, looking intently at me, raising his glass and quaffing with a murmured salutation, "but d'you know, I can put my hand on my heart and say that I've never read a book in my life."

Wordsworth's lines came into my head: "I travelled among unknown men." I didn't believe such a thing possible. "Not even a small one?" I asked.

"Not even a small one," he asserted, "when I'm home my hobby is singing in the choir."

"I used to," I agreed, "where is it?"

"Liverpool."

"Church of England?"

"Certainly."

"Baritone?"

"Yes. . . . Spot?"

"No, thanks very much."

I remembered something, rose, said good night, and

walked out to the sort of buttery-hatch behind which the cashier kept herself. She came to my knock.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"I say. I'd forgotten. Would you awfully mind? I want a shirt and two pairs of socks washed. I shan't be going till Monday."

"But to-morrow's Sunday!"

"I know. But I thought somebody in the hotel might oblige. I mean, I don't want any starch, or blue tissue-paper, or cellophane, or pins stuck in where I can't find them."

"Well, perhaps we can manage it."

"Thank you so much."

"You're welcome."

"Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Down went the frosted-glass hatch, for she was really shut. I climbed two pairs of stairs to my little back room, switched on the light and went to open the window. Below was a narrow court; a street-lamp shone on patches of peeling Georgian stone, architrave and pilaster and pedimented door. Light came from only one room down the alley: "Bath goes to sleep early," I thought.

I undressed, turned on the bedside light, and not feeling sleepy—as I had had a short day and no great amount of walking—I left it on for a while. With my head propped on my hand I stared at the paper on the opposite wall, a charming thing covered with rosebuds tied up with true-lovers' knots in blue ribbon. Thinking of commercial travellers I remembered a story Murray

Allison told me long ago about them. There were two, before a coffee-room fire, near bedtime, a sociable A, just in from seeing friends, and a laconic B, who had been reading. The conversation ran:

A: Taken any orders to-day?

B: No.

A: (after a pause) Have you taken any this week?

B: No.

A: Have you taken any this month?

B: No.

A: (desperately) Well, any this year?

B: One.

A: (leaping up) My God, man, what do you travel in?

B: (languidly) Battleships.

What a story-teller that man was! I used to suspect him of making up most of his stories and most of the songs which he said he had heard Spaniards singing in Havana and Italians in New York. A neat, rosy, dapper, silver-haired man (who used, as it were, to wink at one in apology for his conventional appearance), he had been born in Australia of barn-storming parents, emasculated (as he sometimes used to boast) more sheep than any other man in the Dominion, written and drawn for the *Sydney Bulletin*, come to England with no assets except salesmanship, jumped into the Advertising Management of *The Times* under Northcliffe, parted from that, acquired *Land and Water* for a song, thought of Belloc as a military critic—in fact, that is the way he went on, now with a fortune, now with nothing, and dying just as he seemed safely in harbour. One book

of stories, *Mr. Franklyn's Adventure*, remains for those who did not know him; to those who did know him he will always be alive, and an encouragement. He took more pleasure in his friends' performances than in his own, and there wasn't an art, from music to printing, about which he did not know enough to enable him to cheer on an expert.

Lights out, in a comfortable reverie, I went on thinking of Jimmy Allison, friend of all the world in general and artists in particular. Once, sitting up in his old farmhouse under the down's shoulder at Rodmell, with great logs burning, two more writing men present, and the women gone to bed, he had looked seriously at the fire and asked us—though in less pensive moments he could appear every kind of booster and thruster and, on his mind's surface, believed in a glorious future for every country that spoke English—if we knew what it meant to an Australian to come back to so temperate, so varied, and so kindly a country as this. He spoke of the Americans (I daresay he was thinking of American business and advertising friends whom he had met in Houston and such places, and in whom he had detected hidden feelings of which he himself made no secret) and how they simply (at least, those whom he knew) came to London hotels and notorious beauty-spots and said impatiently, and in language which our own reticence did not permit us to use, but which we understood: "They simply don't know it, boys. Can't you put it across, boys? Can't you paint England in words? Can't you do a gallery that'll just show 'em?" He could see

what he wanted: in some of his spare time he painted in water-colours, and, for an amateur, boldly and well.

One at least of his companions did actually try to begin something that night, with the quiet dark beams overhead, and the casement curtains still in the night air—for to imaginative people contact with “rugged enthusiasts” may be more exciting and helpful than any amount of dry discussion with analytical folk who have read all the books in the world and are aware of all the changing theories (though they seldom see that their own will be superseded) of the ages. “Have a heart,” said Jimmy Allison; it was a kind of ace of trumps which he could produce on the most diverse occasions, and always with effect. And that night, and in the morning (for one did not rise early on a Sunday there) I began a series of scattered stanzas in which I tried to crystallize aspects of the English scene. Snatches, at Bath, I could still remember. One began:

And inns by evening waters broad and still

Whose dark walls bear great browning pike and bream

which perhaps made too much of an effort with adjectives; and:

And tidal creeks whose shrunken runlets gleam

Where blackened hulls lie stranded far apart,

Forlorn on miles of mudbanks. . . .

But it wouldn't work out. Describe I might in cameos. But a long poem could not be a series of framed water-colours, or even oils. Tennyson had done the best in that kind in the “Palace of Art”—pearls strung on a platitude,

too fragile. Fusing was required and that depended on more than brain, observation, the gift of visualizing, ear, taste or whatnot, and one had to wait for it.

I forgot Allison and drifted into thoughts of the Muse and the way she takes people. Some, both among the great and the little, are poets all the time. Some are not; and of the great some are prepared to wait until what Housman calls the "continuous state of excitement" returns, while some are content, out of habit, conscience, or merely because a large public prefers made-up verses to inspired ones, to turn out something every day and publish the living and the dead work together.

Five years it was, I reflected, since I had for a month or two felt that nothing else in the world except poetry was worth having or doing; only to know again the hour when common day broke in once more, and the strange fires had gone from the mast-heads, and comfortable Philistinism seemed no bad thing, and I was even able, who had lived for weeks in an air where beauty and wit seemed one, and the people I knew like gracious forms walking on the rainbow banks of Paradise, to bid, with curled lips, a cold-blooded farewell to the Muse. In bits I reconstructed it. It ran, I remembered, rather like this:

Lo, thus has ended all our escapade!

I must back to work, to grind until the end.

"Poets," Lord Dewar said, "are born, not paid":

How right he was! now what have I to spend?

Item, the income-tax; item, bills for schooling,

Item, the garage; item, railway fare. . .

You hear it all? A truce to all this fooling!

Vain now is even the witchery of your hair!

Back, Muse, into your box; that fetching glance

'Neath lowered lids is useless! Do as you're bid,
Get in and go to sleep—no, not a chance!

Sorry; good-bye; that's right—I'll shut the lid. . . .

But, should I feel an intolerable strain,

Why, Jill-in-the-Box, you may pop out again!

"Five years ago," I muttered in the darkness to my pillow. "It's extraordinarily odd. I simply don't understand it. Is it physical? It must be something in one's self, somehow. For Life goes on all the same. What a trite phrase."

A noise came from the dark court below. It was a quavering raucous voice, off the note, droning the monotonous maudlin refrain of a song about the Isle of Capri. "It hath a dying fall!" I groaned bitterly.

As it faded away, I remembered where, when it had already sciroccoed the world for six months, I had last heard it.

Lunching in a quiet restaurant over the bay at Naples: a wide window, the sparkling sea, Capri a blue enchantment in the distance. The three of us had just ordered: Madame di Z—— and I an omelette, the enterprising Sir X—— Y—— a plate of Neapolitan shellfish, which he had never before tasted.

As we waited, listening to the gentle susurrus of the local epicures behind us, there hove into hearing outside a light operatic tenor, passing on its way. It might have been singing "*La Donna è mobile*," but, very tunefully,

in Italian, with the reproachful fairyland in sight, it was singing "The Isle of Capree." Sir X—— Y—— did not seem to know or notice. Madame di Z—— and I looked at each other wanly.

And, oh yes; when Sir X——'s plate arrived it was crawling with things like great scarlet slugs with small shells on them. He did not move a muscle. As they quested and peered about, he harpooned them one by one and ate them. We watched fascinated and horror-struck. He, like the Colonel and Die-hard he is, admitted no error or regret, but said: "Very nice, too; I shall have some more of them some time."

I am sure he won't. I mention no names. One, at least, was an innocent party.

What a song can recall!

I slept, and did not dream.

SEVENTH DAY

I WOKE when the tea came and, Shanks's pony feeling lazy, asked for three Sunday papers and went through the familiar process of being astonished at the multitude of superb books in the publishers' advertisements, beginning and then dropping Mr. Torquemada's crossword puzzle, getting every light except one in an acrostic, noting with admiration that fifty-nine colonels in Bournemouth were able to inform the world as to the authorship of Casabianca, and wondering whether Mr. Ripley was a man or a League of Nations.

The bells of the city pealed for church. When I had gone through each sheet a second time, reduced to reading about women's clothes and what a good time Lord and Lady Something were having with Lord and Lady Something Else on the Yorkshire moors, I began to think about how I should spend the day: a Sunday alone in Bath, no less.

Human frailty very nearly overcame me to the extent of hiring a car and going to see some people I knew in the neighbourhood. But that really would hardly be the Way to a Horse; and conscience, with difficulty, won.

"What about the waters?" I asked myself, remembering that warm liquid which, like so many modern novels, is just unpleasant enough to be interesting, and no more. But, somehow, Sunday morning (even if the Pump Room was open) hardly seemed the time

for Beau Nash's society. What else was there?

A voice came into my head: "Why not do absolutely nothing? Why exert yourself? Why think? Remember what Walt Whitman so truly said about animals. Fret not, but just let the time pass over you. To start with, you can take a short walk before lunch."

I took a short walk and sat on a seat in a public garden. A dapper-looking elderly man with an umbrella tucked under his arm, and a Cairn trotting behind him, joined me on the seat. "Fine morning," he said. "Yes, admiral," I replied. He looked puzzled, not realizing that his umbrella was descended from a long line of telescopes; then, realizing that, after all, I might know him by sight, he fell into familiar conversation.

What he said about sport, politics, and the neglect of the Navy I do not remember in detail; nor do I remember how we got on to horticulture—probably by noticing flowers in beds. But I do remember my astonishment when he shot out the remark: "I suppose you know that all flowers are constantly trying to become blue?" I said, timidly, that I saw no sign of it in the geraniums, and that roses, with the utmost encouragement from human beings, had never contrived to become blue. "No," he said, "but the fact remains that they all aspire to it." As human beings aspire after virtue, I mused; but he continued with a wealth of botanical detail which I could not follow to prove his thesis. Suddenly he looked at his watch and, with a cheery: "Good morning to you; come along, Jane," departed.

He may or may not have been correct; but he was evidently a keen gardener and if I ever see him again it

will be at the Chelsea Flower Show—though I shan't speak to him, as he won't remember me.

What a delightful lot those gardeners are! Once a year they descend on London in their thousands, these retired men, and wrinkled sunburnt ladies with hands inured to grubbing in the earth, and press eagerly from stall to stall in the hot, shady grass-odorous tents and from rock-garden to rock-garden outside, eagerly discussing whether each primula and saxifrage which they haven't got will "do" with them. Then they depart for their fastnesses in Shropshire or Dorset, leaving the more senseless part of the population to stew in London for a "Season" which ought to be arranged for the winter, instead of for months when hawthorn, laburnum and lilac bloom and die, and the full prime of summer comes on, with the rose. I usually go to the Show, though I do not know which dianthus is a rare one from Tibet and which is not. Each year I learn some Latin names and each year forget, and the same applies when I read the books. I believe I might even retain the umbelliferæ and the compositæ of the Alps (of which Reggie Farrer, who was reluctant to learn more Latin names than he had to, said in his lovely book on the Dolomites, there were hundreds of which he did not know the names) if they were called things like Yodeller's Carrot and Chamois Parsley. But the tendency is all the other way. Even bungaloid wives have learnt to say *antirrhinum* and *nigella* instead of the snapdragon and love-in-a-mist of their mothers, and the time may come when Perdita's catalogue of flowers may all have to be translated into Seedsmanese, and only the rose and the lily will be

allowed to smell as sweet by their old names because the Latin ones are too much like the English ones to make really enigmatic jargon.

Thus thinking, I strolled past the Abbey up the hill, looked into shop windows, observed the decorous streams walking home from church, wondered what proportion of them were going to have roast beef, decided that, since it was Bath and traditional, I would, if I could, have some myself, and walked into the hall of a hotel. Roast beef was on the card all right, but as it was only half-past twelve I thought I would go into the bar and have an *apéritif*. There was one other man leaning on the counter, and as the barmaid left him to attend to my gin and French I could not help noticing that he stared at me rather intently. He was soldierly, sun-burnt, with blue eyes, a plumpish face and a brown moustache. He came up and rather shyly said: "Excuse me, sir, isn't your name Squire?"

"Yes . . . I was sure your face was familiar, but . . ."

"Don't you remember I played cricket for you about ten years ago? In Kent it was; you asked Lewis to bring a spare man. My name's Hopkinson."

"Oh, I remember. Weren't you in the Army?"

"Yes. I'm just back from Egypt now. Are you staying in Bath?"

"No; I'm passing through on a holiday. I'm walking."

"I'm in a car; going on to Taunton to stay with some people."

"Are you lunching here?"

"Thought of it."

"Why not let's lunch together. What will you have?"

"Oh, a dry sherry, thanks very much."

It came. "All the best," said he, and drank.

We talked awhile about India, Egyptian students and the dust of Mersa Matrouh. Then we went in to lunch in a coffee-room which was almost empty.

Harking back to the Near East over coffee and cigarettes he asked me if I had known T. E. Lawrence, who had been killed three months before. I said I had. The Arab Bureau, the Hedjaz, the War: various names were mentioned. Hopkinson paused; then said: "I say, Squire, you must have known an awful number of people."

"Yes," I replied weakly, "and a number of awful people."

"Have you ever thought of writing your memoirs?"

Steel engravings of dead statesmen and horses in walnut frames looked down gravely at me from the walls; their memories at least had been piously preserved; anyhow in Bath. "Well," I admitted, "people have suggested it occasionally and, under Providence, I expect I shall do it some time. In point of fact I'm by way of beginning now."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I'm going to write a book about this holiday I'm on, and I shall put down anything I remember as I go, quite apart from what may happen at the time, such as meeting you during this Sabbath calm in Bath."

"But you won't have any notes or diaries with you. You may forget to put down all sorts of important things."

"That's quite true. For instance, I was once held up to

see Mr. Gladstone appear on a balcony. I don't know the date and I only dimly remember the enormous yelling crowd. If you hadn't provoked me to give him as an example I don't suppose I should have thought of him if I had sat upon every five-barred gate from here to Land's End. So his name, for one, will not appear in my index. . . . I don't suppose," I murmured to myself reminiscently, "he would have been a friend of mine, anyhow."

He laughed. "If I," he said, "wrote a book that way I should be afraid of finding when I finished it that I'd left everything out."

"There is something to be said," I argued, "in favour of the things which spontaneously recur to one's mind being the most important to oneself—or, at any rate, the truest, as it were. Also when I think of my diaries and fifty great boxes of letters I quail."

* * * *

Late in the afternoon I was back in the little lounge. It was the hour when wireless Sunday services begin and the walker in suburban streets hears hymns moaning from many harmoniums. A provincial city at that hour might have inspired the early muse of Mr. T. S. Eliot. The travellers had gone; I had written a postcard; I had found Webster's Dictionary not so readable as it sometimes has been; and I had made a vow that never, never, never again would I decide to spend a day doing absolutely nothing in any place where there was not an out-of-door, whole-time café and, for spectacle, either a lively population of passers-by or a beautiful view. I

smoked cigarette after cigarette, stared at the silent ink-stands and armchairs, and allowed my thoughts to stray over the habitable globe.

China, of course, was no good; it was not yet up, and America on Sunday morning was no more tempting than Bath—though I did remember one jovial hour before lunch in Philadelphia with certain Quakers, newly come from their meeting, who in the house of one of them very heartily defied the then law of their country and were full of good stories. But from a solitary traveller's point of view, almost any town on the continent of Europe would be preferable—place, platz or piazza with sipping sitters and chattering walkers—to any town in England, where for centuries there has been a set and stubborn refusal to admit that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

This globe, according to the latest theories, which are those of Copernicus and Galileo extended, is a speck of dust in the Universe. Alice Meynell wrote a poem, called "Christ in the Universe," in which she envisaged Our Lord, visiting planet after planet, betrayed by Judas after Judas, judged by Pilate after Pilate, and dying for star after star. Hers was one of the great imaginative feats; the answer of the astronomers was that the planets nearer than ourselves to the sun would be too hot, and that those farther than us from the sun would be too cold. But what an answer! Is the soul a matter of temperature?

Anatole France, a sceptic who had his lucid moments, suddenly (I think in *The Garden of Epicurus*) thought that all we are, and know and see, may be but a corpuscle in

the blood of (to us) a giant, who contemplates, not only suns beyond our sun, but universes in which our sun and all our planets are but as corpuscles—and envisages worlds beyond, and beyond, and beyond—for, in point of fact, there is no end to infinity, and there is no end to eternity, and the human brain can comprehend neither of them, and all it can do is to fall down and worship the Greater Glory of God. When one gets into that remoteness of speculation, humble before the Eternal, bewildered about one's own existence, puzzled as to how anything can *be*, and trying to get behind *cogito ergo sum*, all the things of this world appear small.

One reads the papers. "Albania Annoyed at Italian Intrusion," "Canton at Issue with Nanking," "Mussolini and Malta." How preposterous it all appears! And how especially absurd such a thing as Sabbatarianism, and the desire, on one day in the week, to prevent other people from indulging in harmless amusements. . . .

"Well, why stay here the night?" came the voice of common sense. Inclination echoed "Why?" I yawned, stretched, remembered, went downstairs and telephoned; and within half an hour the car was at the door for me. I had forgotten Charles entirely: and, although he would probably insist on dressing for dinner, even although it was Sunday and he a bachelor and I was not in a position to do so, he was a hospitable soul and his house was full of books. He did dress.

We dined well and sat late, and for a brief evening I regretted that I had left long behind the mania for fine, early and rare editions. Before the war, when he and I

were in London, we used to examine second-hand book-sellers' catalogues in the luncheon hour, and compare in the evenings the things we had found in cellars and on barrows. Now in his retirement, he had gone on, and the shaded luxurious room was lined with leather bindings, old and new, with gold letters softly gleaming on them. As I turned over the early printed books, the old poets, the beautiful reprints by modern presses, a desire for material possessions came faintly, but poignantly, back which I thought I had lost for ever; and I was astonished to find how many dates, whether of Aldines or eighteenth-century quartos, had lain dormant in my mind, ready to spring to life like those mythical seeds which did but sleep in the tombs of the Pharaohs. In company with a man who never lived more than he had to in his own time, to whom foreign countries were chiefly places which had contained early presses at Venice, Florence, Basle, Strasbourg and the like, and the map of England was studded (as to others with towns, mines or golf-courses) with good second-hand bookshops, I returned for a while to an air in which Pynson and de Worde, Burton, Urquhart, Baskerville and Charles Lamb were "forms more real than mortal man" at present thumping and bellowing on the planet. Whisky, a siphon, and cut glasses were brought in; drinks were poured out; and Charles incessantly sat down and chatted and then, as something arose in talk, went to open glass-fronted shelves and brought out one more treasure, spreading out his hands in delight over red-morocco, gilt-tooled on the overlaps, armorial deckings on calf, presentation copies from Locke and Beckford, and paper, centuries

old, as white as when, in those strange old strainers and vats and presses, it was made. As I turned over the pages of his trophies my thoughts were half there and half elsewhere. They kept on straying to things I had once possessed and the places in which I had found them. There was the volume of Goethe's songs, inscribed by Frau Goethe, which I had bought for threepence in Bridport when the weather made cricket impossible—gusts of rain and a south-wester that kept blowing the bails off the stumps. There was the first edition of Chapman's *Homer*, with George MacDonald's signature and Homeric drawings of Flaxman inserted which I had picked up in a bundle (also including first editions by Johnson and Defoe) in a London sale-room. There was that noble great encyclopædia of Vincentius Bellovacensis—Vincent of Beauvais—with its thick crinkled snowy paper and illuminated initials. There was the *Margarita Poetica* of Albertus de Eyb, which I could not afford to pay for in cash, and consequently asked the old Jew in Sicilian Avenue to Chiswick to take his money's worth in books—he taking his money's worth ten times over, again and again snatching one more first edition, knowing that I would not let the fine old tome go for the sake of just one more book I valued less. There was that almost complete collection of English poetry worth reading, some good copies, some ragged firsts, from folios of Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher to the obscurest early Americans. There were the first Aldines of Catullus and Euripides (with goffered edges); there was that unrecorded pre-first piracy of Pascal; there were all those pretty French books, with the engravings of the

eighteenth century, the Grécourts and Pirons and Dorats and *The Parrot* by the gentleman whose very name I have now forgotten and cannot be bothered to look up. When again, I mused, shall I ever see a copy of "Jane Squire on the Method of Determining the Longitude"—of George II's time she was, possibly a relative of mine, probably a termagant who frightened the Admiralty out of their wits—or the infamous compositions of Robbé de Beauveset which I should have wanted to be burned by the common hangman had they not been so excessively rare, or of Œcolampadius on the Gospel of St. John and several such which I treasured only (for no human being will ever again read them) because they were not mentioned in the catalogue of the British Museum? First editions of Keats, Shelley and Coleridge passed across my vision; great sets like Dodsley's Old Plays; all those Calendars, Catalogues, Short Lists and other reference books. They had all gone when I moved house, and I had not given them a thought since: yet here was Charles still eagerly pursuing, clutching and poring as once had I, who had moved on stepping-stones of my dead selves to, I hope, nothing worse, and was evidently no collector born but one who had merely wished to learn, and, having learned, willingly discarded his text-books. . . .

The last half-hour we sat in armchairs under the standard lamp, smoking with the tray between us. It suddenly occurred to Charles, who had taken for granted my reappearance after a long interval, to ask me what I had been doing lately. It is never an easy question to answer when relationship has been broken for several

years: you don't know whether to begin with "Had I written any short stories when I last saw you?" "I saw the Eclipse at Sandown two years ago with a woman I don't suppose you've ever heard of," "How many children had I when we last met?" or "Just the same old things, you know." However, some remark or other brought up the subject of contemporary literature, and it dawned upon me that he had read almost nothing new (although he took up the weeklies) for thirty years and assumed that during that period nothing worth reading had been written—he has probably read *John Bunce*, but never *Kim*, one of the great novels of the world. He mentioned several much belauded novelists into whom he had dipped and asked me how on earth I could admire them. "I don't," said I; "I think they are clever shallow cheapjacks." "Well," he grumbled, "everybody seems to read them." "I don't care if they do," I replied, "but there are plenty of better writers than those." "Where are your poets?" he went on; "I tried a volume by So-and-so not long ago, and it was dreary pretentious rubbish." "I quite agree," I said. "Well, what did I say?" he continued; "they're all rotten." I was tempted to go for him and try to ram into his head all my admirations and try once more to make him see; but as I looked at his scholarly profile and greying hair I remembered old conversations and asked myself what was the good of disturbing him by exhortations which could never convince him. He was the immovable mass; he was quite resolved not to read his contemporaries; instinct led him to notice only those of them whom he would have disliked even had they been dead;

and all of them were part of that hot living present from which he wished to flee. He will never read these lines, as I am a contemporary; though, were I to edit Fuller's *Worthies*, he would be enthusiastically interested and send me corrections and footnotes for a second edition which would never appear.

Undressing, in a large and Chippendalish room, I sang snatches of the most singable modern poems I could remember. I laughed aloud as I wondered what look of horror, as of one who fears a maniac, would come over Charles's bookworm's face were I to swing his bedroom door open and loudly exclaim:

The Saracen's Head looks down the lane
Where we shall never drink wine again. . . .

* * * *

That was then; and now as I write, the "Saracen's Head" looks down the lane, and the world will never be the same again; for Chesterton is dead; and, just before him, the great lyric poet of whom he said when blowing away pessimism with great lusty puffs, that "The song of the cheerful Shropshire Lad is simply a perfectly horrid song." Charles, I am sure, can never have done more than dip into either of them with predetermined resistance: one to him was probably a journalist and the other a don. Yet, a hundred years hence, the Charleses of the period (provided the progress of science, trade, and dulce and decorum has not blown Europe to bits), will be busily searching shops in Bideford and Newcastle for obscure pamphlets which Chesterton himself did not

remember writing, and the more jovial lovers of great men dead will assemble at the "Saracen's Head" in Beaconsfield (unless a bench of dissenting licensing magistrates and secret drinkers has abolished it as redundant) and quaff pints to Chesterton. The little Della Cruscans and Spasmodics of our day, with their fashionable modes of obscurity and sham violence, and their peevish hatred of love, laughter, jugs of wine, boughs, thous and song, will have whimpered and sneered their way into oblivion, but the hearts of boys and men will be braced by the lays of the laughing cavalier who at last left the lanes and the wild roses to go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green.

Thus I thought in bed, not realising that within a few months not Chesterton only but several others would have gone who seemed to have been always there and a world without whom one never contemplated—such men as he and Kipling seemed ageless and fixed, and now they are both gone, and there are only two or three remaining whose names were known when my generation was young, and after them there is almost a whole generation missing. It is strange to think that, if one lives for another twenty years, one will be regarded as a sort of Methuselah because of that gap, and they will wear a sort of "Did-you-once-see-Shelley-plain?" air when one admits to having had acquaintance with Hardy, Bridges, Housman, Alice Meynell and all that race, and to have met people who met people who knew Keats and Lamb. What will they look like if one mentions some of the peacocks of the hour such as Presidents of Boards of Trade, Education and so on?

Bewildered, I expect; for, though the names of one or two of the Prime Ministers of our time will be kept alive with the Pitts and the Gladstones, those of others will be duly, if dully, handed down in the chronicles like those of Rockingham and Addington, Joash and Jehoash.

EIGHTH DAY

“**W**HICH way are you going?” asked Charles after breakfast.

“I’m not quite sure,” I said; “let’s have a look at the map.”

We spread it out on the table. “If you’d like to be dropped anywhere within reason you can be,” he offered.

“Roughly anywhere except Radstock,” I murmured as my forefinger roved over the red-veined tracts of brown and green, “or, for that matter, Midsomer Norton, in spite of its pretty name. The Fosse-Way is attractive, and if I went to Stratton I might have another look at their new chapel at Downside, though it does take the gilt off their old buildings, just as does the new chapel at Charterhouse which makes the rest of the place look like St. Pancras. There’s a place here called Binegar. I must have been through it, I suppose, though it is strange that one shouldn’t remember a place which rhymes to vinegar—though a rhyme to that is not needed so much as a rhyme to silver and a few more rhymes to love which might obviate the necessity of the eye-rhymes “move” and “prove.” Well, never mind; drop me on to the top of the Mendips by Pen Hill, and I’ll walk down through Wells.”

He had had some catalogues by the morning’s post, so he sent me by car. I stopped it on the top of the ridge,

got out and sat down by the road-side; and there suddenly came into my head a thought of St. Clement of Alexandria.

Why?

Well, there is no evidence that St. Clement ever came to Wells, though some think, and I like to think it myself, that St. Joseph of Arimathea came to Glastonbury and planted there the Holy Thorn. But I was, as the crow flies (or flew), only two or three miles from Wookey Hole, and St. Clement of Alexandria said something.

The texts of the very early Fathers, apostolic and other, are growing dim in my memory, though the impression I derived from them when young, those men so nearly in touch with the great event, so overshadowed and overwhelmed by that recent thing, and mostly so simple in their language as they were certain in their belief, has not faded; to open their pages is to lift a curtain behind which dwells awe: they are half-way between the companions of Christ and those later men who more and more settled down to ecclesiasticism, theology, and the definition of heresies. The personality of only one of them has always remained alive to me, and that one is St. Clement; for amongst those good bishops and fishers of men he was the link with the cultivated world, a devout Christian so sensitive and well-read that he could have responded to the legend which arose some centuries after of the sailors who, passing the Morea, heard a voice calling from the hollows of the hills, "Great Pan is dead." He was, if I remember, an Athenian born, and brought up in the schools of pagan philosophy; he became Bishop of Alexandria and

wrote discursively, amusingly, kindly, quoting (and here again I draw upon memory and refer to no more than I thought of on the Mendips) Homer and Euripides. He was probably an admirable missioner to the cultivated Greeks of the city, the frequenters of the great library which was burnt up in the prairie fire of Islam, the neo-Platonists, the scholar-successors of the unnecessary men who invented Greek accents, and of Callimachus, whose work has mostly sunk out of sight but who wrote that lovely address to the dead Heraclitus which Johnson Cory turned into a perfect English poem:

Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake,
For Death he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

For Alexandria was not entirely populated by the characters of Pierre Louÿs.

I had not, I recalled, as I surveyed the great landscape below me, thought of St. Clement for a very long time when, a few years ago, he was suddenly and violently brought back in the most unexpected surroundings. It was a Sunday in August and another man and I went in my car for a "run round" the Mendips—Wookey Hole, the Cheddar Caves, lunch at Cheddar, up the gorge and along the hamlets on the Bristol side. It was a lovely sunny day; we saw some lonely churches with fine towers; even the swarm of holiday motors could not spoil the majesty of the Gorge, the great perpendicular cliffs coiling snakelike to the summit; and in the garden of the inn at Cheddar we caused pain by asking, with apparent sincerity, for Canadian Cheddar cheese. But the caves, for all the strings of electric lights and the murmurous

company of stumbling trippers, were the thing; the pools, the smooth cataracts, the pillars and stalactites of many-coloured limestone, milky, golden and blue; and the moment of all to me was the moment when the guide made that remark.

He had done that tour through the underworld, I daresay, for many days in many summers: and, like the housekeepers in great half-shut country places and the vergers in cathedrals, he had his lesson by heart and probably said it perfectly every night in his sleep. In grotto after grotto he told us the romantic name of the cave and described whatever bones of men and beasts may have been found there: now and then he switched on lights which, human agency apart, would never have been on sea or land, let alone in the bowels of the Mendips. And then, somewhere in the course of his discourse, this grey official with the peaked cap, "doing" (as the saying goes) "his stuff," quoted St. Clement of Alexandria—possibly about caves at Delphi or Dodona, but I don't remember—and staggered me. My eyebrows went up and up, the transverse wrinkles in my brow deepened, my temples tightened, my mouth opened, and then I had to resist a temptation to make all the caverns of Mendip echo and re-echo to my laughter. For what had St. Clement to do with Wookey Hole, and where the devil had the official guide to Wookey Hole, who personally conducted through it parties of motor-cyclists who had never even heard of St. Ignatius Loyola, learnt about Clement of Alexandria?

Enlightenment came later. When we blinked back into the unscholastic light of day I bought a guide

written by a gentleman—a prince of troglodytes or, as they call themselves, speleologists—and, amid all the anthropological and geological information there was embedded (as, according to Tennyson and fact, eggs are embedded and injellied in veal-and-ham pie) the very quotation from St. Clement which had passed so glibly, amid those Dantesque recesses, from the punctual and unamused lips of the guide. “England! my England!” I thought; and loved my fellow-countrymen for their solemnity. I hope I am not libelling the guide when I suppose that, out of that context, he knew very little of that Saint who inhabited, like Pater’s Marius, both the groves of Academe and the Garden of Gethsemane; and I am quite sure that not once per annum is there amongst that throng of tourists, becappped and plus-foured, and temporarily sobered by the ancient and the subterranean, a man who ever heard of St. Clement, or of any of the popes Clement, or even of Clement Scott; yet never a one of them, and bless them for it, even in the neighbourhood of Cheddar would ever rise before the guide and shout out “Cheese it!” For, in certain surroundings, we respect learning, just as we respect religion in church.

“Shall I go to Wookey Hole again?” I thought to myself: and then: “But why curtail the already curtailed cur?” And then: “What on earth is that to do with it—Wookey Hole is not a cur and you were not thinking of curtailing it. You were merely thinking that you didn’t want to do the same thing twice, or at any rate this thing twice.”

“Stop!” I said, to this daimon who will, day in, day

out, and even in my sleep (for the phrase "night out" might be misleading) keep on rebuking me, correcting me, quibbling, splitting hairs, and checking me in full innocent career, "cannot a man be allowed his little harmless parallels of sound and meaning, and even his plays upon words?" I pulled up a bunch of grass and chewed it savagely. "For," said I, "where would all those wandering authors have been, Lucian, Rabelais and Sterne, if they had not been allowed (they hadn't you, you beast, to stop them) to give their tongues a loose rein occasionally? Anyhow, damn you, the phrase just came back to me."

Full summer; a slope at my feet; the mellow day gentling over that long stretch of Somerset: Wells, Glastonbury and all that isle of Avalon in which you can take your choice between Arthur and his last fight and Alfred and his cakes; but if you are wise, will be like Chesterton and accept both, both being certainly true symbolically and perhaps true in fact. But did, in these surroundings, Adam Smith, Cobden and Bright ever exist? I do not want to be profane, but can anybody imagine anybody else, divine or human, contemplating the Cobden statue in Mornington Crescent (quite properly placed amid all the dismalness into which false philosophies led us) and saying: "Consider Cobden in his bronze frock-coat and bronze trousers—was Solomon in all his glory arrayed like unto one of these?" *Sartor Resartus* was written too early; and drawn too early were Thackeray's pictures of Louis with his clothes and Louis without his clothes. The clothes of nineteenth-century England are its condemnation; and Lord Macaulay, for

WHY, INDEED?

all his brilliance of style, never objected to them, but probably thought them a stage in progress towards God knows what. Think of Bright without his clothes. It isn't possible; and, if it were, we should shrink from it.

* * * *

"It's quite easy to be wise after the event," said the daimon (perhaps it would save trouble if we began to spell him "demon"), "but weren't those people just as well-meaning as yourself?"

"I daresay they were," I reflected; and, unmeaningly again (and I dared not say the lines aloud because of the way in which the demon had reprimanded me when I quoted Calverley) there came into my mind the last lines of Thomas Ingoldsby which began with:

As I laye a-thynkyng, a-thynkyng, a-thynkyng,
There came a little bird and it sang upon the spraye.

The little bird came and sang to me: and it sang to me, and to all in all generations who deplore their elders: "Truly we are the children and wisdom shall die with us." It seems hardly possible to even ordinarily sensible minds of our generation that we could have done almost anything that, as a nation, we have done in the past. Why on earth did we wage the Hundred Years War or the Wars of the Roses? Why on earth did we allow ourselves to get to such a point as to have to stomach the Tudors? Why did we let Oliver Cromwell murder the king and then murder Parliament in the cause of Parliament versus the King? Why did we bring in that ghastly Dutchman? Why did we lose a reluctant

America with Pitt, Fox and Burke telling us not to? How could we, throughout the nineteenth century, pretend to ourselves that Charles II was a monster because he had mistresses (to whom, as to everybody else, he was kind), and regard it as an article of faith that none of his successors indulged themselves, and less openly and elegantly, in the same way? How could we have been conquered (it almost induces one to think that Marx's materialistic philosophy of History may be true) by the *laissez-faire* theory of economics, which suited the manufacturing middle classes, was reconciled to the crawling of women on all-fours in coal-mines and the sale of small children from the southern workhouses to cotton factories in the north, covered the country with slums and derelict factories and justified all the predictions of Disraeli? How could we have supposed that a League of Nations based on the doctrine of "One Nation One Vote" would work in a world so variegated in regard to race, climate, development and power, and with nations all of different sizes? Theory, theory: what crimes are committed in thy name! "That damned Rousseau!" I exclaimed to myself; and then I reminded myself that there had been a great deal of harm done in the world long before the Geneva watchmaker's son ever began writing operas about shepherdesses, fabricating fantastic origins for the State, pulling down pillars, or getting maidservants punished for thefts which he himself had committed. "The swine!" I thought; and then the demon mocked: "What about casting the first stone?" . . .

Unable, although I had more spare time than over-worked Cabinet Ministers, to unravel all the mysteries of history or the problems of contemporary politics in an hour, I thought it better, squaring my pack, to resume my pilgrimage, reciting to myself the consoling line of the poet, A. Y. Campbell:

“God speaks in history, and man in myth.”

“But even that,” I reflected, as I lightly trod the downward way to Wells, “begs a question in the first part: it is a little determinist, is it not? It isn’t so much ‘God helps him who helps himself’ as ‘We can’t help ourselves, God help us!’ It is a little irrational to saddle ‘a power not ourselves, making for righteousness’ with jerry-building and Hitler’s ‘purge.’ ” I remembered the Tower of Siloam; and was comforted to think that a greater than all of us left the mystery where it was, so far as this world is concerned, and got himself crucified not only for our redemption beyond, but for our strengthening here. And then I thought how trivially my reflections had begun, and the demon said: “Your thoughts wander superficially from this to that and you grin one moment and go serious the next,” and then I answered: “Fool demon, I believe you are the Devil himself; for all things are interwoven; you cannot move a grain of sand without troubling a star; a man saw a ladder going to Heaven from Charing Cross; I shall let my thoughts stray wherever they will and no imp of Satan shall prevent me from cross-examining the past, the present, the future or myself. *Retro me!*”

Something departed; and I thought no more that day

thus introspectively, being a healthy body moving through scenes of beauty and watching them with outward eyes.

As I came into Wells under the gate I was glad. I went to an inn and left my baggage there; and unimpeded walked across the Close and into the cathedral, looking again at the strange arch and the great old clock. Then I went outside again and wandered round the moat which surrounds the bishop's palace. There is a bell-pull there which hangs down into the water: it is there for the disdainful swans to tug on when they feel hungry. The swan tugs, the bell jangles, the food is forthcoming; and they have been doing it, father and son, for centuries. And within the moat there is that old palace, the oldest massive brick part of which dates from King John.

It was about lunch-time. I wanted lunch, and I wanted to see the inside of the bishop's palace; and I thought, though I wasn't quite sure, that the Bishop of Bath and Wells was a member of my own old College at Cambridge. He who hesitates is lost. I hesitated and was lost. And now, unless the bishop, by some incredible coincidence, happens to read this, I shall never see the inside of that lovely place, which I conceive to be full of illuminated missals, chained books, and recumbent, mitred, effigies in alabaster or marble, removed from the church by King Henry's order but preserved (since it was so far from London) by the piety of the priests. The piety, I may add, was sporadic; the Historical Manuscripts Commission published, twenty years ago, volumes about the clerics of Wells before the Reformation which contain a good many funny stories, but harmless stories,

and none so disgusting as the story of the fat, be-whiskered king who murdered Sir Thomas More and the aged and saintly abbot of Glaston.

I went back to lunch alone; and there came to me the thought, recorded by Rossetti: "When have I been here before?" I ordered some cutlets, remembered that I had been there many times, and then suddenly remembered that I had been there once significantly. Not in the years when I was merely walking back to Devon; not in the late years when I was taking cricketers round the counties, from Campden to Taunton, on Sundays when we were "not working"; but once when I went back to Devon with a fellow-Devonian, I suppose thirty, but it might be forty, years older than me.

The men (partly owing to the war which obliterated so many people who would be now between forty and sixty) who remember John Lane in his prime are now probably few. When I was at school I knew his name as the publisher of the *Yellow Book* and the *Keynotes Series*. I thought of him as a person mixed up with Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde: clever, audacious, and definitely *fin-de-siècle*. The odd thing is that John Lane simply detested all that.

To lead up to the time when I went to Wells with John Lane (I providing the car and he the petrol, for he always arranged things to the uttermost farthing and would bargain you out of a halfpenny and give you a champagne and lobster dinner afterwards) I am afraid that I must go some way back.

(Remember that we are still at Wells: that lovely cathedral, and that arch, and that close, the competing

and ancient hotels, the swans, the libraries, the choristers, and the moats.)

Well, when I was at school (and I left school thirty years ago and still meet superior youths who think they have discovered Baudelaire for the first time in the Croydon Free Library or the Oxford Union) I struck those *Fleurs de Mal* of Baudelaire with the spell-binding portrait of him in a smock, the head slightly bowed, the great melancholy eyes looking straight at one above the wide sensuous mouth, and Gautier's ample introduction. I used, after lights were out, to steal down from the dormitory to my study in a dressing-gown to translate him, carefully drawing the curtains so that no chink of light shone across the lawn to Mr. Francis's premises—I learned long afterwards that they knew all about it but assumed I was up to something innocuous of the sort, though I daresay their eyebrows might have gone up had they seen my industrious versions of *The Giantess*, *The Carrion* and the poem about the repulsive Jewess. My own natural imaginings were not in the least like Baudelaire's (he haunted me but he did not infect me), but most young writers go through intellectual measles of some sorts, and for a year or two I "experienced" all the grimmest literature I could find. Not that it was only the fact that his material was very unlike that of the approved poets with whom I was familiar and who were fit to be studied in schools. There was fascination in that strange mixture (to be found also in Flaubert) of realism and romance, in the wistful personality which stood in the mud and looked at the stars, in the marble purity of the style and the firm ring of the music. However, at

school and later, I translated most of him (though a few were too horrible for me) and there came a time when I thought I would like to publish them—a few were ultimately published in a small book of verse which I rightly suppressed because of its falsity, which I did not perceive until it was printed: my late father-in-law, moreover, startled me by not realising that the translations were translations, and expressing the hope (not to me) that they did not record actual experiences of my own.

It was in the autumn of 1906, when I was twenty-two. I was sitting in an upstairs room in the office of the local daily (now extinct) at Plymouth where I worked for two years until I got a small job in London, and Mr. John Lane was suddenly announced—he had come up to gossip with Mr. (now Sir) Herbert Russell, the naval expert of the organ, with whom I shared the room. Lane was a little man with a round head, round bald forehead, shrewd narrow eyes, plump pink cheeks, and a neat pointed white beard; brisk in all his movements and full of chatter. I was any nameless young man in a provincial town; he gave me an Egyptian cigarette out of a gold case and began by rather coming it over me as a metropolitan veteran, speaking familiarly of literary lords and such, for whom he always had a harmless propensity. When he found I was not illiterate he changed his tone and was on the job (Chesterfield might turn in his grave at such a phrase) at once. Had I written a novel? Was I thinking of writing a novel? If so would I send it to him? No: but I wanted to publish a volume of verse translations from the French. The light

was dimmed in his eyes; I could see him thinking: "What, one more of them?" for the vogue had passed of those Bodley Head poets of whom somebody wrote:

Lo, where upon Parnassus' slopes they romp
The sons of Wat, of David, John and Thomp.

Still, he said gallantly that I should send the manuscript to his London address.

I did. It came back, not to my surprise. He very civilly wrote to say that he had shown it to Mr. Arthur Symons, who had said that he preferred my translations to somebody else's: but that there was no demand for such things, but, as a fellow-Devonian, would I get in touch with him as soon as I came to London? This I did, and after some years he gave me manuscripts to read, and until his death I saw a great deal of him, frequently dining at his house (which was full of treasures he had picked up, including an excellent portrait by Gilbert Stuart) or lunching at the Reform or the Cocoa Tree Club—which was Queen Anne, the oldest club in London, had a blackened cocoa-palm trunk shooting up in the middle of it, and is now, unhappily, no more. At one such gathering, in 1924 (the last year of Lane's life), we were talking, as usual, about Devon (for Lane was born in a farmhouse near Hartland, a strange origin for the patron of the *Yellow Book*) and I said that I was going to tour it by myself in August with an open car. He said he would like to come with me. That was arranged. I picked him up, I think, in Bath, and we spent a happy fortnight on the road, and I became very fond of him as we went circling and criss-crossing Devon, descending

for meals on country houses with pictures, admiring views and investigating every church we saw: his eyesight was defective and I sometimes became almost exhausted reading out to him every old time-eaten epitaph in a churchyard.

Never did I hear (and I wish I had imbibed it all) so much information. Lane had a collector's memory. Everything in Devon was sacred to him, and he knew everything that was to be known about the smallest "worthies" the county had ever produced. "Stop!" he used to cry in some hamlet, "we must go into the little church here; there is a tablet to Joseph Skinner, the engraver." He had no idea that there are times, in a motor-car, when one should not divert the attention of the man at the wheel; constantly when I was threading the traffic of such places as Ashburton or Chudleigh, he would suddenly clutch my arm and exclaim: "Look at that little barber's shop on the left. It used to be the baker's shop where Solomon Toop, the portrait painter, was born"; Toop, as often as not, being some obscure eighteenth-century son-of-a-gun of whom I had never heard. Even on the lonely roads of Dartmoor, with the purple heather everywhere and the little streams tumbling down from the tors, and the bog-pools reflecting the blue of the sky, the excerpts from *Devon Notes and Queries* would come rattling from his tongue, for local lore meant far more to him than landscape and he would have liked the tors better had their rocky crowns been the birthplaces even of faded commentators on the Old Testament.

Wells, after we had left Bath, was the first place at

which we had stopped: coming back alone, I thought of him, and his vitality quenched, of how he had been a legend to me before I ever met him, of how then I had known him for years, and now he was a legend, and a waning legend again. And I found myself reflecting on the strange phase of literature with which his name is associated.

I don't know who coined the phrase "The Naughty Nineties," but it was rather a silly one. There is at least as much to be said for "The Dirty Thirties" which I recently heard applied to our own decade. Queen Victoria was on the throne; Lords Wolseley, Roberts and Kitchener were national heroes; Kipling was expounding the duties of the Empire; Watts was at the apex of painting; Hardy, Meredith, Henry James, Gissing and Stevenson reached audiences who had never heard either of Hubert Crackanthorpe's stories or of his suicide; Conrad was beginning to be known; the characteristic entertainments of the period were Gilbert and Sullivan's operas; Austin Dobson had a great reputation; the dominant critics were Gosse, Saintsbury, Birrell, Dowden, Lang, "Q," and others who, had they been confronted with much of our own "modern" literature, would not have minded seeing it put in the furnace; the dreadful, crude, emancipated, middle-class "naughtiness" of our own day was unknown. Beardsley was no more typical of the age artistically than Wilde was socially. Still, there was something distinctive there and most adolescents were drawn to examine it, if not permanently to like it: for it was something new in England.

Even *The Yellow Book*, let alone Lane's General List, was not, atmospherically, all of a piece: Lane, for instance, published the poems of A. C. Benson, and it would be difficult indeed to think of Arthur Benson talking of "splendid sins" or describing in verse his travels from music-hall to gin-palace with a marauding lady in a feather boa. Lane, to the young, indeed, seemed to publish almost all the exciting new authors and to have a monopoly in poets. As a publisher, to certain ages and temperaments, just after his greater exploits, he dominated the sky. It was, of course, a false impression; not only were the great ancient saurians, the Longmans and Murrays and Macmillans there, as they still are, but very likely several publishers like Methuen actually did more business than Lane; yet Lane was the man for novelties. And though, as I have said, his authors were by no means all of the same kind, they appeared to be more of a kind than they were because they were all under the same distinctive umbrella. Books published by Lane all had a common and pleasant idiosyncrasy of format: whether they were sacred or profane, they were printed, decorated and bound in an especially Laneish manner. And, although the contents of the *Yellow Book* included stories and articles by such respectable authors as James and Benson and at least one drawing by Lord Leighton, whose Greeks savoured more of the Court of Saint James's than of the Court of Argos, the fact remained that all were enveloped in a cover of a shockingly bold yellow and that the cover was originally adorned by an undoubtedly decadent drawing by Aubrey Beardsley.

"What," I thought to myself in that luncheon-room at Wells, while I sipped my coffee and (in order to help recover my youth) a liqueur brandy, "really was the art which gave rise to the theory about the Naughty Nineties, and what were its origins and who were at the centre of the movement, though it may have been a movement which preached anything but movement, and came in the end to very little." There came to my mind two lines of Canon Ainger's, who wrote:

I would we had more of the godly heart,
And less of the Bodley Head.

There did flourish, under the umbrella of that brisk farmer's son from Devon who collected antiques, loved dining out with the great, hardly ever read a book, but had a nose for fashions and for paid readers who could spot the potentially fashionable, a certain nucleus of authors and artists who were definitely Bodley Head and what (though the type is a permanent one) is now known as "ninetyish."

They mostly derive both manner and matter from the French: from Baudelaire, Verlaine, Gautier, Maupassant, the early Huysmans, Zola, Daumier, Toulouse-Lautrec and Félicien Rops—and it may be remarked that French influence is usually stifling to English art, turning our feet on to tracks which lead to dead-ends: or should I say culs-de-sac? They flaunted style like a banner; their view was that art should do anything in the world except conceal art; they were contemptuous of the industrial and bourgeois age into which they were born, but unlike Ruskin and Morris they did not thunder

against it, but curled their lips against it and took refuge from it with their bars, stars, nenuphars and lupanars, all of which, in some sort, rhymed. They were the Romantic movement gone to seed, unable to fly from Les Villes Tentaculaires, and escaping into deliriums of sex, or sacerdotalism, finding consolation in the Latin of the Rite, or from cadences like grey evening over Thames or Seine, or patched, powdered, red-heeled prose like that of the *marquises* in *Under the Hill*, or apostrophes to suicide and annihilation. Linked to these by a common rebellion against convention were certain bold realists and reformers, mostly women, who wished to preach the glorious free future in language more frank than was then commonly used, but to us prudish to a fault, and challenging that view of "Reticence in Literature" which was so eloquently preached in the *Yellow Book* itself by the young father-to-be of Mr. Evelyn Waugh. With a centipede foot in every camp there was the young Mr. Max Beerbohm who made a first appearance in the *Yellow Book* with "A Defence of Cosmetics" (which, being incorrigibly healthy, he probably disliked) very far, in spirit, from those poems about rouge, henna and patchouli, which took strange pleasure in the painting of the cadaverous faces of consumption, dissipation and death, hollow under the pallor of glittering gas-light chandeliers. In retrospect, even now, they take a large place in the contemporary scene; to the young, thirty years ago, they seemed even more significant; yet to most of their own contemporaries and elders they really mattered very little. Dowson, a very typical one in point, was never "on the

map" until Mr. Arthur Symons edited the pathetic invalid years after he and the *Yellow Book* were both dead. Wilde, as John Lane so often protested, never even wrote for the *Yellow Book*: "I couldn't stand the man," he used to say. But Beardsley illustrated "Salome," and there came that dreadful trial. I was too young, being ten or eleven, to know much about it. All I remember is hearing "Oscar" yelled by roughs after each other in the street, and one more thing. There were at that time certain pink sheets calling themselves "Police News" and such titles, which used to hang up in the little sweet-tobacco-news-agents' shops in the lower portions of the town. Usually the frontispieces displayed masked and bull's-eye-lanterned burglars shooting constables, who fell with outflung arms and crisped fingers, or else heavy-moustached murderers standing above prone women in shifts from whose gashed throats blood streamed to the floor. There came a week when my small eyes saw something, on my way back from a little school, of which I did not know the meaning. The headline was, "Sale of Oscar Wilde's Effects," and the effects appeared mostly to be opulent naked statues—doubtless of gods and goddesses, Aphrodite and Antinous, but at that age I didn't know even that much, though the image stuck and sticks still. All that must have made John Lane red in the face with anger: as the crude rhyme goes, "Everyone thought it was me." He never got quite away from the association; though I must admit that until his dying day he clung pitifully to the notion that since Beardsley succeeded, anybody who imitated Beardsley might succeed. The truth was that Beardsley's

style and outlook—remember that terrible Messalina and those corpulent Jews shivering like jellies at the shivers of Wagner—were just tolerable in a genius, but that imitators without his genius were quite unbearable.

“Well,” I thought, “eleven years ago on that trip, I used often to try to get Lane to talk about all the strange hierophants of sin whom he used to publish, but he would always change the subject and talk about Hayman or Opie instead.” Suddenly there came back to me acutely the memory of a library of which I was given the run during the holidays when I was in my last years at school. It had belonged to a man (his young face was in Rugger groups of 1883 and 1884 in the dining-room of my house at school) who was, if this can be understood, the adopted nephew of an adopted great-aunt of mine, and whom I had known, in my childish lowliness, when, elegantly dressed and moustached, he loomed above me before he dropped dead on the Hoe from heart disease, brought on by excessive cigarette-smoking, which was the right end for a ninetyish man, if not for Sir Richard Grenville. Just before I was old enough to talk to him as man to man he died; his foster-mother, who had also a huge aviary in a conservatory, full of Java sparrows, waxbills, and parrakeets, and a parlour crowded with woolwork screens, canaries, solitaire boards, mahogany, parrots, filigree, fans, and elongated engravings of Nelson dying on deck, surrounded by spars and pig-tailed tars, and Wellington exchanging hearty greetings with Blücher after Waterloo, would not part with a single book that he had left behind him. His library, which was between hall and twittering aviary, was

dusted and used as a passage; but it was never read until I, considered a promising youth with an eccentric taste for promiscuous reading, was let loose on it.

He must have been an odd man, and I wish I had been old enough before he died really to know him; I did not realize then (taking, as the young will, all things for granted) that he must have had certain sophisticated years in London before he came back to Plymouth (where such beings must have been scarce) as a rather opulent young auditor or solicitor or whatever he was—for I do not even remember that much. Everything that John Lane had ever published was in that book-lined chamber, and some of the books were inscribed by their authors (one at least is still alive) to this mysterious creature who to me was but a reserved proud face, a moustache and a cigarette. I thought when he died, for he was moderately portly and of a full complexion, that he was an ageing man, whose prime was over: he cannot have been much more than thirty-four when the cigarettes (but at that time coroners regarded cigarettes as next door to cocaine) stopped, or did not stop, his heart. But die he did; and a few years afterwards his adoptive aunt (who, when I was rising nineteen and had just spent a bitter snowy week at Cambridge trying to get a History Scholarship at King's and getting one at John's, stood me, on my way back to the West, a luncheon at the Arundel Hotel near Temple Station, that ancient if often rebuilt and redecorated hostelry which Dickens praised and at which she stayed for fifty consecutive years) died also. All she had, and his books which she so jealously kept dusted and in their places, was left to

a brother of his, who was, as it might be, vicar of Eastbourne.

I remember that vicar well: he may be still alive, and I hope he is, even though he did tell me that (this is over thirty years ago) the speech of all my generation was slurred and slangy, and say to me, aged fifteen, "Of course we both agree about the paper constitutions of Carlyle." I agreed, like the devil: at any rate I knew who Carlyle was, and had made extracts from *Sartor Resartus* in a note-book. But what did the vicar think when his brother's books were sent on to him; and what did he do with them?

I have often wondered. The Lane publications: well enough. The autographed *Dorian Gray*; well enough: many a High Church parson probably flaunted it in the eyes of his parishioners in order to make them sit up, and God knows the moral was morality itself—we begin with face and features statically beautiful or ugly, and what we do and think will turn them, by heavenly or infernal light from within, into ugly or beautiful; an old Alcibiades would hardly have compared with an old Socrates, though he had ever so great a start: this Socrates knew, and it saddened him, for he loved the lad. All the works of Zola—how well I remember reading them in my holidays, the whole lot of them; over-rated then but underrated now. He was a repulsive man in a way; boringly Republican, Rationalist and Realist, though he did let his suppressed self out a little in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* and a great deal in *Le Rêve*. His *Rome* was documented in a fortnight. He arrived (*cf.* the *Cose Viste* of my friend Ugo Ojetti, who had

the task of taking him round) with note-book and pencil, determined, like a reporter, to record the right cross-sections of Cardinals and Duchesses, and went back to Paris thinking he knew all about it. His *La Terre*, which (had the French cared to produce a companion to *Cold Comfort Farm*) could have been devastatingly burlesqued, was utterly humourless, though doubtless many of the facts were inhumanly correct. His *Germinal* was justified by a drowning scene in a coal-mine which epitomised all the love and heroism which have come to a climax in all the drowned pits everywhere, and may again be witnessed, save by corpses in position, to-morrow. His *Débâcle* preached in vain the lesson of the foulness and futility of war. There was *Nana*; there was *The Rush for the Spoil*, there were all the volumes of the Rougon-Macquart series.

Well, all those the vicar may have gladly inherited; not very good literature, but morally most determined. He may also have gladly contracted the early novels of George Moore: *Esther Waters*, *A Drama in Muslin* and the rest. *Flames*, by Robert Hichens, would not have disturbed him, nor *A Yellow Aster*, nor the works of Ouida and Edna Lyall. He could safely have taken over Rabelais (illustrated by Doré), the *Contes Drolatiques* (illustrated by Doré), and the translations of Petronius and Lucian. But what about the books in the little room upstairs—the German psycho-physiologists and all that, *Le Moyen de Parvenir* and the utterly boring but undeniably corrupt compositions of Restif de la Bretonne? Vicar: what became of them?—for it is the deuce and all to destroy a prettily-bound

book even if one wishes that the contents had never been written. . . .

It was getting on for four o'clock and the waiter, the lounge having emptied, was hovering around with the apparent desire that I should pay my bill. I paid it, picked up my pack by the straps, went out, found a seat, and began to reflect. I tried to hark back to the 'nineties, remembering at the same time a remark of Wilde's that "dialect is a method of re-creating a past that has never existed." Sitting in the sunshine I fished out of my pockets certain envelopes and a pencil, and began, having nothing better or worse to do, to try to write in the manner of those forty-years-gone people of "the 'nineties." Only beginnings came; for, truth to tell, I did not see why the originals should have been finished, let alone the imitations. There came a beginning:

Rain drifted quickly down from a lilac sky. Miss Jones felt the child stir within her.

That would do for George Egerton, and (in matter at least) for Grant Allen.

The washing of the *blanchisseuse* fluttered on the line. The leaves of the poplars trembled silver in the sad wind; Gustave sipped his absinthe.

That would do for Crackanthorpe.

Ah me, ah me, the quiet end of evening fades
Nunc it per iter tenebricosum, to the shades
 Where all the roses, all the roses, roses go,
 Had it been otherwise, ah yea, I know, I know.

That would do for Dowson, and then, thought I, what on earth am I doing here in Wells, thinking of all those and of Mallarmé and Debussy when I might be setting my blood coursing on foot? I forgot all about them as I sauntered ("strode" would be more powerful, but not true) out of the town; but I still remembered Debussy. The miles between Wells and Glastonbury are few. The Tor with its monument can be seen all the way, and the expectation of that ancient place felt. But, as I cast my eye to east and west, and thought of the antiquity of the land, the pallid and urban, tense and bearded face of Debussy came between me and the fields and hills; for I had once seen him. One thing leads to another.

It was some day in the lost time before the war, and at the Queen's Hall, that Debussy appeared to conduct a concert of his own works. The place was full and somebody had taken me to a box whence the conductor's face could be seen in profile. The year I do not know, nor whether it was after or before that first production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* at Covent Garden, a perfect marriage of words and music which seems to memory to have been one monotony of pale arms under dark trees by old crumbling towers or in torchlit cavernous corridors, with wan voices lamenting over an existence in which the blind lead the blind from one dread enigma to another. At any rate, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* had for some years been familiar to the adherents of Sir Henry Wood, joining that company of popular favourites, such as "1812," *Finlandia*, *L'Apprenti Sorcier*, the *Casse-Noisette Suite* and the tone-poems of Richard

Strauss, which still stoutly hold the Promenade fort to-day. For some years, fascinated by what seemed the revolutionary extension of symbolism and impression from literature to music (for music crossed the Channel slowly then) young women, with mildly Socialist opinions and hair parted Madonna-wise, had been yearningly playing in the candle-lit, brown-paper-walled drawing-rooms of Hampstead and Chelsea, those wistful mysterious piano pieces about cathedrals under the sea and rain falling on places that never were, full of the sound of elfin horns, muffled bells and little winds wandering about the whole tone scale. At any rate, London was ready for him.

The place was packed, and the orchestra crowded in their serried tiers; amid a roar of applause Debussy stepped down to his desk, and the impression his face and mien made on me was unforgettable, there was such an intensity about him. He stood rigidly and his head was black and ivory, a wave of black hair falling over his right brow, his moustache and beard black, his face chiselled in ivory—deep sunken eyes with shadows under them, hollow shadowed cheeks, set mouth—a face bearing the marks of illness, of incessant labour, of passionate exactitude.

After a few bars of one of the "items" (perhaps the first, but certainly one of those short pieces such as *Nuages*, *Fêtes* and *La Mer*) his face suddenly contorted, he flung his baton on the ground, and simultaneously spat out some expression, undoubtedly contumelious, but inaudible in detail and probably incomprehensible to the orchestra, who were English. There was a pause

as heart-stopping as a scream; and then the audience rustled like reeds. An appalling mistake had been made. Somebody, let us say the tenth bassoon, had either missed a note, played the wrong note, or played the right note in the wrong place. If that unhappy instrumentalist is still alive I daresay he is the only man except myself who remembers the disaster. But I remember also, when the baton had been resumed, the pale face composed, and the piece started all over again, thinking to myself, "How dreadful it must be to take things so seriously! And, my unhappy genius, who on earth in the audience would have noticed or minded such an error in such a shimmering tissue of sound any more than he would notice in a reproduction of a landscape by Monet if one pale-pink spot had appeared in a corner instead of one pale-green one."

"Those were the days," thought I. It isn't that they were necessarily any better than these: even this year at the Promenade Concerts swarms of youths and maidens are standing, smoking, moving from one foot to another with aching loins, have been shouting themselves hoarse after hearing for the first time the Ninth Symphony, or the *Jupiter* or the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with the rapturous feeling of discovery which might be a blind man's who, on being given sight, should be confronted with his first moon or his first primrose. Thirty years hence they may be talking to each other about their first hearing of Respighi, Granados, Lambert or William Walton. It is a mistake to confuse the loss of one's own youthful freshness with a deterioration in the quality of the times. What cannot

be helped, and should not foolishly be deplored, is that one cannot experience first love twice, any more than Cortes could twice see the Pacific for the first time from the peak in Darien. Even when in later life one hears a work, new to oneself, by a great composer, one already knows his language so well that there will never be the shock of utter novelty about it or the sense of overwhelming beauty and strangeness. And the same applies to new composers: they are never so surprising as everything was in youth unless they achieve complete novelty by eschewing euphony and throwing the baby out with the bath. Surprise I certainly had, but not delight, when I heard Bela Bartok play a piano concerto of his own, and I shall never forget the time, in 1913 or 1914, when Arnold Schönberg, saluted then as a new planet, came to London to conduct a Schönberg programme.

He was still, I daresay, a Professor of Counterpoint, though nobody would have guessed it, and he had given up his earlier manner, in which he was an ape of Wagner, as Richard Strauss is when he forgets he is a Viennese. The outstanding feature of the concert was a number of supposedly impressionistic works. Was it only fancy when one thought one saw on the faces of the very orchestra bewilderment and a desire to laugh as they obediently produced an apparently disconnected series of little twangings, grunts and groans, poppings of corks and gratings of cart-wheels? About the audience at least there was no doubt. They exploded with laughter, ran out into the corridors to laugh with each other, imitated the noises, cheered ironically, and only just stopped short of barracking the conductor like a

Sydney cricket crowd. For myself I enjoyed the audience, if not the music, and went away remembering a story I had heard about Rossini being taken by young friends to hear an opera by the new marvel, Richard Wagner. The dialogue, after the show, ran roughly like this:

DISCIPLES: What did you think of it, Master?

ROSSINI: I don't think it would be fair to express an opinion without hearing it a second time.

DISCIPLES (*eagerly*): And when are you going to hear it a second time, Master?

ROSSINI (*emphatically*): Never!

Both he and Wagner would doubtless have been surprised to hear that a century later their operas would be performed together at Covent Garden. For me I am of Rossini's party, because Wagner invented a din not known before, made voices bellow against instruments, was so anxious to reach a peak of noise which could only be achieved by the falling of the firmament that he piled climax after climax until he almost burst, was unbearably prolix, and took his silly allegories seriously, fit hero for the ex-Kaiser and Dr. Goebbels. There are people (some of them slaves of fashion, some liking violent assaults on their senses, perhaps) who would prefer *Siegfried* or *Tristan* at Covent Garden to *Figaro* or *Don Giovanni* at Glyndebourne, and who do not think the "Prize-Song" from the *Meistersingers* glutinous. I am not of them, nor ever was: and yet what powers he had!—as Schumann, who wrung his hands over him very early, recognized.

These things, I reflected, as I passed by dull fields,

are as may be: both individuals and ages differ in their tastes. The only time I remember an audience so angry that it mostly walked out expostulating was when the Stage Society first produced Tchekov's *Cherry Orchard*; yet nowadays they all take it like lambs, and will even swallow that dismal Seagull. The time may come when those works of Schönberg's (though it must be remembered that even if good new composers often have a difficult passage, not every composer, or painter, or author, who has a difficult passage is necessarily destined for later fame) will be whistled in the streets by errand-boys who have heard them on the wireless, sandwiched between the *Peer Gynt* suite and Harry Finkel and his band. Anyhow, I wish I had Hazlitt's memory for detail and could write about musicians something like *My First Acquaintance with Poets*. To have seen and talked to so many, and to remember so little of what they said! What a pity! Bernard van Dieren, who died the other day, had the greatest intellect of all the composers I have known. In his profound and witty last book, *Down Among the Dead Men*, he records immense conversations between himself and Busoni, who was his intellectual equal and the greatest pianist of our time, in which every word rings true and in character, and I doubt if he took notes. Yet here am I, who have had conversations with Van Dieren since Busoni died, and remember little of them except that we usually agreed about the good, the beautiful, the comic, the pretentious and the vulgar, though never will the power and breeding in his eyes and features depart from me.

For music and faces, scenes, expressions and the atmosphere of men and poems, stay with me better than words. I should still remember, even had I never met it since, that grand opening theme of Elgar's First Symphony, heard at its first performance, conducted (unless that was another time) by himself, rather stiffly, in a square-shouldered frock-coat. I remember the breathlessness of the audience, wondering how the superbly elongated thing could be brought to a satisfactory close; and my own wonder as to whether the symphony could live up to it; and the tremendous applause at the end; and thinking, as I cheered with the rest, "I suppose this is partly unconscious relief because an Englishman has at last written a bearable symphony." Yet I met him not long afterwards, and talked to him frequently after that, and what remains? The image of a handsome colonel kind of man (who might, at sight, have written the bandmaster part of his music) with haughty eyes, aquiline nose and a heavy grey moustache, watching billiards and enjoying a good cigar. I once noticed one of his admirers saying that Elgar's music was as English as the Roast Beef of Old England—or Old Argentina, as we should now put it. As a compliment applied to any music not meant to be jolly and humorous it was hardly suitable: wild hyacinths and chalk downs are as English as roast beef, and much more like music, though one can imagine the Boar's Head being brought to Hall to the strains of "Land of Hope and Glory." But certainly to the casual fellow-member of a club the conventional side of him was uppermost. None the worse perhaps: A. E. Housman,

unless one got him alone, preferred to talk about claret and the Navy. So, for that matter, often did old, stoutly Anglo-Irish, Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, whom I used to meet, though much more often and intimately, for he played bridge as regularly as he played it badly, at the Savile Club. Everything about him, in those later years, drooped: tumbled forelock, eyelids, cheeks, moustache, chin, shoulders. At the bridge table he was constantly disputatious in a lachrymose way: "Ah, me bhoy, whoy on earth did ye (or didn't ye) put me up?" was his regular remark to his partners. Nobody minded, for away from the table he was delightful, interlacing his fingers as the sparkle returned to his old eyes and he repeated old funny stories about Dublin, London and Cambridge. At Cambridge he was for long Professor of Music. He told me that once Tennyson (whose *Revenge* he set to music) was visiting him there and they were setting out for a walk to Coton. A clergyman hurried up to them and, saying to Tennyson, "May I join you, sir?" proceeded to do so. His chatter was incessant and boring; Tennyson, to Stanford's shock and surprise, began to use the foulest language. The cleric stood it for as long as he could, but grew paler and paler, and at last had to fly with a stammered farewell. "That's finished off that bloody parson," growled Tennyson, and resumed his normal style of conversation. Stanford knew that there were greater musicians about than himself, and was handsome to and about his abler pupils. He told me that one of them, whom I knew, was perhaps the most promising composer alive. I thought to myself that there was something both of

Beethoven and Mozart about him, but the after-effects of the trenches did their work, and a breakdown came, which still continues.

I dodged a charabanc. Sibelius, I reflected, a greater than Elgar, is still alive. In Finland, not long ago, asked if there was anybody I wanted to see, I said "Sibelius." I was told that it was impossible; he was now a recluse. "Tell him," I suggested, "that it is an Englishman who writes verse." The result was favourable, and after lunch three of us motored for forty miles through that succession of up and down, pine and birch, lake and wooden chalet, which makes the northern countries so monotonously delightful. We were received with charming hospitality by Sibelius and his wife: he had not forgotten that England had given him his earliest and warmest welcome, though he could not commit himself to a date for that last long-promised symphony. His head was impressive; the mass of Strindberg's without the madness. That I remember little more is perhaps pardonable. There were five people present. Each knew two languages, but no two the same two. English, French, German, Swedish and Finnish had to be employed, and everybody politely tried to keep the conversation general. Lord Macaulay, doubtless, would have remembered every word in each language; Boswell or Eckermann would have put out with note-book and pencil as soon as the car left the gate. To me it all seems to have passed in a dream, ending with a stirrup-cup of John Haig and the kindest of partings.

The newer composers may be better, as good, or worse than those who were new (Ravel, and Max Reger, the

pattern-maker, who seems to have faded out, were amongst them) before the war; or it may be that music has been gradually dwindling since Brahms: but can it be doubted that the great performers were better then than now? Sarasate and Joachim hardly belong to the period, though I heard them both. Nor Patti, though her old and cracking voice had brought tears to my eyes at the end of one of the last of her many farewells. But Calvé was still singing; Caruso and Melba were in their prime, and for those in London to whom singing meant above all *Lieder* there was Elena Gerhardt, at her greatest with Nikisch accompanying; George Henschel (who, when he was nearly eighty, used to descend on me at my office and warble Schubert with little power but all the old intelligence and sweetness) and, more modest, but perfect in a small hall, Plunket Greene, so full of human wit and understanding, and absolute master of his voice. Pachmann would return again and again, playing Chopin as nobody (except possibly Chopin) can ever have played him; more and more eccentric as the years went by, joking with the audience and telling them precisely what was what, but with fingers like rippling streams. But to me there was above all Ysaye, who magnetized me more than any player of any instrument whom I ever heard, and much more than Kubelik or Kreisler or any of the amazingly brilliant violin prodigies who have succeeded him.

I heard him many times before need drove him to become a conductor at Cincinnati or Milwaukee and stole him from Europe and the violin. Most of all I remember him when, with that firm, clear player the

old bearded Pugno at the piano, he gave (about 1909) the whole of the Beethoven violin sonatas at a series of very badly attended concerts. There was no pose or panache about him. He appeared, calm and dignified, lending majesty even to a frock-coat, bowed, took up his fiddle and began. There was absolute mastery of technique, but a fusion with that of the highest qualities of brain and heart seldom found together. And his bended head, the heavy, impressive, yet sensitive, clean-shaven face, with the eyes smouldering over the music another had made and he was sharing, had the power and the fascination of a Sphinx or a Rameses come to life, something ancient, experienced in all joys and sorrows and climes, yet resolved to be reticent save through the medium of the bow, with which he could sing the tenderest and the most tremendous things with utter conviction and no exaggeration. Often in the darkness I can see and hear him now.

* * * * *

"I say," said the demon, "where have you got?"

"Nearly to Glastonbury."

"Mooning along like that it is a wonder you haven't been run over."

"I was thinking of music."

"Do you mean Rutland Boughton?"

"If you like."

"Did you ever see *The Immortal Hour*?"

"Yes."

"What is the meaning of the title?"

"The first act, I suppose."

This insulting reflection cheered me up as I entered the town, and made for the "George," or "Pilgrimes" Inn, one of the few genuine mediæval hostelries, built as such, which survive in England. What a noble façade it is, with its bright heraldic shields, its mass-strong verticals and bold archways! That inn, and a few other things, suffice to dominate in Glastonbury the later pleasant things and the modern unpleasant excrescences. I went up the yard and had a tankard. But there seemed to be rather a lot of motor-cars and gin-and-Frenches about; so remembering that on the threshold of that place I had made my peace (after a gross misunderstanding) with that genuine, but (or and) suspicious Radical H. W. Massingham very shortly before I saw him buried in the Brompton Cemetery, that awful memorial to *laissez-faire*, I went elsewhere to find supper and a bed.

I had my supper. When I came out, dusk had fallen and it was steadily raining. I scuttled down the street and went into a humble bar. Three or four old men were sitting there. "Raining again, master?" "Yes," I admitted. A second butted in very slowly: "Not until them forty days are up," said he. The rest of us could not remember whether St. Swithin's Day had been wet or fine, so could hardly refute him. But the third produced a red herring: "It'll be full moon o' Sunday," he said, "and that do often make a change." But the first was not to be robbed of his gloom. "Then 'er wastes," he said, "and I remember the old folks tellin' me that when 'er's wastin' 'er spills it out."

I raised my glass to them and mused. There were they using such a phrase as "a wasting moon," suggestive

of Coleridge and dim light on desolate seas, but suggestive of all wastings and declines of physical decay. Their roots are in the elementary facts of nature: birth, maturity, failing and death; they are never far from the churchyard. That is what made Thomas Hardy their one great representative spokesman. His celebrated gloom did not mean an abiding sadness in himself: he merely accepted. In his prime he drew a picture to one of his poems (for he commenced active life as an architect) representing a church and its floor above, and, below, a charnel-house full of open coffins with skeletons in them. In old age he took me out to "Mellstock" and, surveying the tombstones of his sires, asked me what I thought of the lettering. I commended it; and, with enthusiasm in his eyes he said: "If you ever want a good monumental mason, just drop me a postcard and I'll let you know where you can find one."

"A wasting moon." I remembered how many other words, generally supposed to be archaic or artistically affected, I had heard slipping from the mouths of old rustics; not thirty miles from London there are places where you may still hear, from settle and ingle-nook, old men saying that when young they were "lissome." Young ones too: for the old things die hard even when opposed by education and the wireless.

I talked to them a little about Somerset cricket (they all remembered Sammy Woods and Martyn) and then went back early to bed.

In my bedroom I found a Bible. By lamplight I read two chapters of St. John. But the print was too small for me; my eyes swam; I blew the light out and before

I fell asleep cursed and damned a political system which is quite capable of taxing the whole population in order to provide children with free spectacles, but will not do the obvious thing which even the oculists (who are not entirely selfish) would back up, and prohibit, on pain of death (a justifiable thing where offences are cold-blooded), the use, whether in book or newspaper, of type below a certain size. Before literacy became general it didn't matter so much; but now, every year, visiting schools of any grade, travelling in any sort of conveyance, one cannot help noticing that year after year the number of the young who have been clapped into spectacles steadily increases. Reading at all is probably bad for the eyes; but that cannot be helped, it is the price we have to pay for the advance of knowledge and the distant hope of civilization. But reading minute type is the devil and all.

"Will they stop it? I doubt it——" I murmured to myself, as I drifted into the fourth dimension and the world of J. W. Dunne.

NINTH DAY

BUT what can one say about Glastonbury? If there is a county in England where more than elsewhere an open-minded person is forced to regret the Reformation, and its child the Great Rebellion (both run by Welshmen in unconscious revenge), it is Somerset. The whole county, still rich in treasure, is covered with things destroyed, ruined, or despoiled: and as one sees the brick suburbs crawling out along the roads, and the tea-houses, and the petrol-stations, one wonders whether the time is not in sight when almost everything worth looking at in what was once the loveliest of all counties will not have been made by Nature, with whom man, as lately as the Wars of the Roses (during which Eton, King's and thousands of parish churches were built), used happily to co-operate.

Sanitation was not good in the Middle Ages. The Indian proverb ("The nearer the village the greater the stink") would have been applicable to England then. Lunatics were burnt as witches. Plague and famine swept the country. So they do now: the plague of ugliness and the starvation of the soul. Pathetically we rush about "saving" this, that, and the other, and trying to "stop" things, instead of releasing our creative energies for a further addition to the beauty of our earth; and the things we try to save are usually the work of those abused monks, against whom war is still

being waged all over the world by fanatics who have no sense of any other life but this.

I went into an inn in Glastonbury expecting to find farmers talking about horses. Instead of that I found two Tappertits talking about foreign affairs. One of them preferred General Chow Chung to General Chung Chow, and President Lupez to ex-President Gomez. The other took the opposite view; and neither of them had ever seen China or South America, or realized that Glastonbury Tor was above them, the "Pilgrims" Inn near them, the ruins of the Abbey something to be cared for, and the shades of Arthur and Alfred dwelling over Avalon.

Then a man came in with a wrinkled, keen, horsy face, and a conspicuous check suit. He ordered himself a double brandy and soda and informed me that it was a fine morning. I agreed. Gradually we slid into conversation. He said he thought that Mr. Baldwin was the best of them but he was damned if he knew why; and I agreed to that. He then discoursed about various sports, blood and other, and I agreed to those. And then he suddenly said: "Are you a writing chap?" and I replied: "More or less, amongst other things, but I hope I don't look like one." "There's something about you," he remarked, "and I'd like to tell you a story, but, mind you, you mustn't mention any names or give people any clues."

"Really," I said, "I may be many bad things, but I am not a contemporary novelist."

"Well," he said, "you may or may not know it, but we doctors come across a lot of strange things, and it's odd that you writers don't make use of them."

"Why don't you write them yourselves?" I asked.

"Too damn busy," he replied, ordering two more drinks from a lady he called Maudie and appeared to know very well; and then: "Do you happen to be a Roman Catholic?"

I said "No," but I thought I understood what it was to be one.

"Well," he went on, "there was a patient of mine near here, a Frenchman with a French wife and several children. They weren't rich and they weren't poor; they lived in a little villa surrounded by rhododendrons and laurels; they didn't keep a car but when they wanted one they hired one. What will you have?"

"It's my turn," I protested, feeling as if I had got into one of the works of Mr. Ernest Hemingway. When he was satisfied he resumed, fixing me with an Ancient Mariner's eye, and waving his glass in the air. "Now this chap," he said, "an elderly man with a pasty, clean-shaven face, was always regarded as a mystery in the neighbourhood. There was nothing against him. He always paid his tradesmen's bills. But there it was.

"Just about a year ago I had a telephone message saying he was ill. I went out there and found he'd got a growth in the bowel. Even operation couldn't save him for long, but operation was obviously necessary. I told him so. D'you know what he said to me?"

"I don't see how I can, really," I replied, reasonably.

"Well," he proceeded, "what he said was, in his foreign accent, 'Do what you like, but I won't have an anæsthetic.' And I said, 'Damn it all, man, your heart's all right,' and he replied that his body was his own.

"To cut a long story short, I gave him a local which worked on his lower half, and he watched me doing it."

I suddenly had a vision of that horrible picture in Bruges of the flaying of Cambyeses.

"Of course," he concluded, "it only postponed things for a few months, and it was only when he pegged out that I discovered what was wrong."

"What?" I enquired.

"He was a Roman Catholic priest and he still believed, and if he might die he ought to confess, and he didn't want to tell another priest that he'd broken his vows. And his wife, mind you, was a very nice woman, very quiet, and she looked after the children very well."

He pulled out his watch. "I've got a patient," he said, and ran out to his car.

* * * * *

I collected my baggage, and that day, by divers roads and field-paths, went to a small town which is set pleasantly on a hill. It lost me distance, but after all, I was not out for records and Lord Wakefield had not offered me a prize. I saw some good views and a church or two; and, ultimately, an excellent steak and a comfortable bedroom. But before I sought the solace of this last I met another odd man, who rushed into the bar very eagerly. He was touring by himself in a car, and was a convinced, philosophical, anti-feminist.

He was tall, thin, hollow-cheeked; a splash of black hair tumbled over his left brow and his eyes glittered with fanaticism. Drinking (an odd idea) a dry sherry after his dinner and leaning his right elbow on the

counter, after a preliminary exchange of commonplaces, he suddenly shot at me the question: "What do you think about women?"

It was rather a surprise, and difficult, like being asked what one thought about the Equator; and I was only able to stumble out some remark to the effect that I thought women were quite all right, really. His reply was, "Well, I definitely don't."

He had a slight stammer and wagged his forefinger at me: there was a Regency touch about him, he seemed to have a stock on though he had not, his manners were elaborately ingratiating, he gesticulated with hand and eyebrow, and opened every paragraph with "But, my dear sir"; sometimes adding, "Of course, I don't know who you are, but——". I thought he must have made a regrettable marriage in early youth. He told me what had happened in Greece and Rome as soon as women were emancipated, he said that women were idiots for competing with men instead of being men's inspiration, he demanded to know why they should expect men to stand up for them in trains now that they had the vote, he said that he had seen two women in riding breeches the day before in an inn and had played dominoes with one of them for half an hour before realizing that she was not a man, he denounced Lady Astor, he bedazzled me with illustrations drawn from all ages and climes, and then, with a suggestion that sooner or later the men of Britain would rise and re-establish the harem, he shook hands hurriedly and ran out with a final expression which suggested "You have been warned."

"Who was that?" I asked of the plump barmaid.

"Don't know his name," she replied. "He calls here sometimes. We think he's batty."

So did I, but they say a man's all the happier for a hobby. I was reflecting on that in a corner, having taken in all the marrow from a battered edition of some Western evening paper, when I suddenly asked myself: "What is your hobby, then?" And it dawned on me that I no longer had one.

It wasn't for lack of encouragement. My mother, when I was young, repeatedly gave me boxes of carpenter's tools, and the *Boy's Own Paper* every week offered me instructions as to how to build anything from a yawl to a fowl-house. Never, so far as I remember, did I spoil a single foot of material with chisel or plane; the tools, in time, merely got lost. But collect I did, with a vengeance.

Collecting began with . . .

The large barmaid's voice interrupted me. "I bet your thoughts are far away. You're thinking of something pretty deep."

"As a matter of fact," I acknowledged, "I was thinking of beetles."

"I bet you weren't," said she; "beastly things, I hate 'em."

I placated her with that abominable but widely-favoured drink, a port and lemon, and resumed my memories. For I really—and people seldom believe you when you are telling the truth—was thinking of beetles.

They were the last things in my youth—before I reached the age, now in its turn passed, when I searched

the Minorities and the New Cut for incunabula and water-colours—at which I arrived. It began with crests (there were albums for such then), coins, and postage-stamps; I inherited a collection of each from my mother, and some time or other they took wing and departed. Then there were birds' eggs, butterflies and moths, all a camphory moulder in their cabinets, and at last it came to beetles—and, as a sideline, bugs—not the household variety but the delightfully diversified little flatirons which would be more popular did they not share that opprobrious name.

It all happened, one holiday, through going to buy an exercise book at a printer's and stationer's. It was not a busy morning, so I fell into conversation with the shopkeeper, a lively little man with spectacles and a big black moustache. Quite out of the blue he asked me if I would like to come into his back premises and see his beetles. I didn't know what he meant but naturally said yes; and in a minute I was surrounded by tens of thousands of them all neatly arranged on white boards in their sliding shelves.

I had to unlearn some things, of course. I was informed that a black-beetle was not a beetle at all, that there were many weevils, for all that Captain Marryat may have said, which did not live in ship's biscuits, and that a ladybird was a beetle, no more, no less. The printer was a propagandist and an enthusiast: no Mormon ever went after a "prospect" for the Latter Day Saints more zealously than this little man set out to draw me into the congregation of coleopterists. He was eminent in his world. If there is a Royal Beetle

Society he was certainly a Fellow of it, and he showed back numbers of some Institution's Proceedings which recorded several beetles which he had added either to those known to science or to the recorded British species. He showed them to me: they were very small and I was not surprised that they had been overlooked. All the same, when I left that shop, with a present of Ray's *British Beetles* under my arm and a promise to be a faithful beetler on my lips, I was a convert, and, I firmly believed, for life.

And how distant is one's past! Was it really I who turned over all those stones on Dartmoor and in the woods looking for the bombardiers, who parted the branches of gorse for the Jew-beetle, who netted the ponds for the dityscus and his larva, the beastliest thing ever seen outside Bloomsbury, who counted the spots and noted the hues of the ladybirds, and peered through lenses to differentiate between species of the long-necked weevils? Well, actually it was. But when did I stop? I simply don't remember. And why? I don't know.

"Suppose," I said to myself in that corner at Win-canton, "I were to start all over again to-morrow. Either Sir Josiah Stamp or somebody else says daily that every man ought to have a hobby, and here is one of the easiest. There are beetles everywhere, infinitely cheaper than Picassos and Matisses, and much more beautiful. If to-morrow morning, when I set out for Camelot or wherever (for Cadbury may have been Camelot) I hop over a hedge occasionally and turn over a stone I can begin collecting all over again, and shall have things over which I can pore lovingly in

winter and old age. Why miss such a chance? Why not, at any rate, collect something?"

"No," I replied to the demon (for such it again was), "never again! I am content to know that the beetles are there and to look at them alive when so inclined.

What wondrous things
Thy hand hath made

is what I now feel about beetles, if not about our latest coins and postage-stamps. What is the use of possessions, and why, above all, prefer a dead animal in a cupboard to a live one in its haunts? There was something to be said for collecting in one's boyhood; it took one about and made one look out for things."

"Have it your own way," said the demon, "but the time may come when you have nothing to do at home except listen to the wireless, and you know what that's like as a rule."

"I shall play patience," I said; and the demon retired bored, at least for the time being, though ready, as always, to return at odd moments with suggestions about gardening or book-plates.

"Anyhow," I said to myself, "merely living is a hobby in its way." I had unintentionally spoken aloud. An emphatic "Ah!" came from my left, and turning, I saw the period piece with whom I had been conversing earlier in the evening. "Hullo," I said, with no great originality, "are you back?"

"My dear sir," he confided, "I found your conversation so interesting that I thought I might as well come back for an hour. I've just put the car-lights on."

It would hardly have been civil to say that I had barely opened my mouth to him, but I saw no reason why I shouldn't go on listening and I wondered what would be his next text. "We were talking about women," he said.

I nodded.

"Well, are you fond of mushrooms?"

He had chosen his own ground, and I thought it was time I made a stand. "I think," I said, "they are amongst the most beautiful things in nature. No dancer ever had such exquisite pleats as their pink gills, and, in spite of their seeming solidity, they are so exquisitely light. And the other fungi too . . ."

"But, my dear sir," he interrupted, "I didn't mean that at . . ."

"No," I said, as with instant comprehension, "I didn't mean to say that I entirely agree with this propaganda in favour of edible fungi. After all, there are only a few score of those, whereas there are thousands of the others. It simply isn't safe unless you are an expert. All I meant was that, poisonous or not, when you see those lovely splashes of orange and red and purple in the autumn beech-woods you wonder . . ."

"I'm so sorry, sir," he exclaimed, still polite and eager, "but I mean, don't you think they're good . . ."

"Good, and remarkable," I assured him; "a man told me that in Hawaii another man watched a fungus grow three inches vertically in five-and-twenty minutes. It belonged, I think, to the Stinkhorn tribe. We have some of them in this country. But fungi, of course, are very cosmopolitan; they are much less local than plants and . . ."

"But what I mean," he returned with a despairing precision of speech, "is, do you like them to eat?"

"Stinkhorns?"

"No, mushrooms."

"I like them better than almost anything else, but I hardly ever touch them."

"Do you mean they don't agree with you?"

"No, they agree with me perfectly."

"Then I'm afraid, my dear sir, your remarks seem a little paradoxical."

"It was in this county of Somerset, I believe," I continued, and curiosity made him keep silence, "that . . . but have you heard of André Simon?"

"Do you mean the wine man?"

"Yes, and the food man, and the book man, and the garden man and a very fine man. Well, in one of his books he gives a list of menus he has had. Once he told a man he liked mushrooms. He came all this way to dine with him. What did he have? Mushroom soup, sole with mushrooms, chicken with mushrooms, and mushrooms on toast. I forget the rest, but that was enough; there may or may not have been a mushroom sweet."

"Ah, I see, so you were merely joking."

"Not at all. Nine times out of ten they come on as a savoury. I have a very moderate appetite and by the time they are reached I have stopped eating. So I have to admire them from a distance."

He looked as one who had forgotten what he had meant to say. He glanced at his watch and then, crying: "I must get on, good night, sir, good night," ran out.

* * * *

The matronly barmaid was wiping a glass. She followed his exit with a compassionate smile, and then turned to me with an upward jerk of her head. I asked why on earth he had suddenly started talking about mushrooms. "Oh," she said, "he always preaches about something or other and then he forgets all about it. Before you came in there was a chap telling him about people down here growing mushrooms so as to keep the foreign ones out."

"A very good idea," I said; "I think there's a tariff now."

"It's a pity they can't put on more of them," she sensibly remarked; "I suppose they want us to starve in the next war."

"I suppose they do."

"Look at wheat!"

"Look at potatoes!"

"Look at bacon!"

"Look at eggs!"

"Look at fruit!"

"Look at vegetables!"

"Look at cheese!"

With a unanimity to be found everywhere in farming England we looked at all these things and others, and wondered what vengeance the populace would wreak upon the politicians should another war bring us to the verge of starvation. None, of course. Probably there will be a new lot in, who will say that it wasn't their fault.

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"Time!" said the barmaid. The last revellers said their nightly good night and she locked up. "Would you like anything before you go to bed?" she asked. "Just one," I said, "won't you?"

"Thank you very much," she said, "I should like a port and lemon." She poured out the night-caps and sat down with a sigh of relief. "Well, there's another day over."

"Tired?"

"Not more than usual. But I don't think most people realize the amount of work there is in a place like this. You see, it isn't so much the serving, it's the endless washing up and dusting. You see all those bottles and glasses? I dusted them all before we opened this morning."

"Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks."

"Been at this job long?"

"Since the war."

"Oh."

"My husband was killed."

It was a bit too late to say that one was sorry. But I was.

* * * *

She lent me an old "shocker." It was so very unconvincing and illiterate that I thought I would turn the light out and think of something. Hardly tariffs in bed, I reflected, so turned to the beauty of fungi, those brilliant slabs and spikes and domes. Why were some of the most venomous so magnificent? Had I heard

somebody say "as a warning to men and beasts." But some poisonous things are not splendid, and the peacock is eminently edible. It's like the old business of protective colouring: if some have it, why not all? Why should the partridge and the leaf-insect be so especially favoured? No; Nature's hand was as indiscriminate as it was lavish.

Idly in the darkness I thought of the hues and patterns bestowed on giant serpents, and on tigers as well as on the gentle innocent spotted deer. And on the mackerel: was there anything more resplendent than the blue-green-silver sheen on a mackerel freshly taken from the water? When I got to Devon I would go out and catch some, bait hooks, watch bright spinners crumple enlarged and dimming out of sight, feel the dripping line thrill through my fingers, watch the far pale cliffs over the blue ripples as we tacked to and fro in the bay. A grizzled fisherman who wouldn't talk much. When had I last been fishing at sea? No, I didn't fish. It was two years ago in Plymouth Sound when I went out with the official trawlers and we scoured the bottom because a hospital urgently wanted starfish. Twice we brought up the trawl and poured great mounds of heaving fish and weeds on the deck, monkfish with their angles, plaice with their yellow spots, poor-man's cod, whiting, red ribbon-fish, sea-slugs, crabs of all sizes, weeds—red-brown, green-brown—all colours, spreading, wobbling, writhing, streaming, flapping, slipping, sliding, banging on the deck in the clear sunlight. Oh, to plunge one's arms into them! I thought in a way: and in a way, I shrank.

We took them back to the Aquarium. There in shallow tanks were "transients," dogfish and others living in temporary amity, nothing of strife except when the lobster near death was deliberately picked at the joints by the giant crabs.

Aquariums. The Naples one. The Monte Carlo one, out on the Prince's Rock. The New York one at Battery Point, with the shoal of little moving moonbeams from the Bermudas and that ghastly great Jew-fish with his nose, who stared at me with bulging marble eyes. I was with a girl. "I don't like your face," she said quietly to the fish.

The fish either did not hear or did not care.

I laughed at the memory, and sank into a bottomless sea of sleep.

TENTH DAY

IT was a filthy morning, much too bad for going on until it cleared. I thought I would lie in bed and have breakfast for once. The maid came with the tea. "I think I should like to have some breakfast up here."

"Very well, sir. What would you like?"

"What have you got?"

"Bacon and eggs? . . . or bacon and tomato?"

In English country inns that dialogue is as standardized as any of the ceremonies of the Roman rite—I don't mention the Church of England, which offers more latitude. What follows is almost as regular.

"Bacon and eggs, then; and could you possibly let me have a morning paper?"

"I'm afraid there's only the *Mail*."

"That will do perfectly."

"I'll get it now if it's come."

The *Mail* came and I glanced over its pages, comparatively so much more sober than they used to be. There were rumours of war in it, and I remembered the remark Voltaire made when a general war seemed imminent. "Won't it be necessary to make peace after the war? Why the devil don't they make it at once, then?" There were remarks about home-grown food. I heartily agreed, not merely on grounds of prospective starvation but because I knew what my bacon would be

like; the decline of British farming seems to have taken the heart out of British cooking and housekeeping. In the old books bacon was always "crisp." Who ever sees crisp bacon now? Soggy leathery strips; and as often as not further waterlogged by the presence of tomatoes reduced to wet pulp by frying—an indignity almost as great as the frying of peaches. Then I saw something about modern French painting and began wondering, sipping my tea the while, as to whether the influence of science, and in particular the doctrine of evolution, upon the arts wasn't responsible for the modern lack of emotional depth and sensuous appeal. As A. E. Housman remarked, it takes "neither pains nor brains" to be in the fashion, and there always have been fashions, which have always been superseded.

"Ripple-ripple-ripple" went the rain in the gutters; the roof across the sky's lid was covered with dripping hair and eyebrows.

"They are much more concerned about changing things than with seeing or feeling them," I reflected, "and they are encouraged to think that the only object of art is to have a perpetually evolving technique."

"You're getting stuck fast in the past," said the demon.

"I'm not going to be taken in by that, my friend," I replied.

The door opened. "Your breakfast, sir," said the little maid.

"Still pelting," I remarked.

"Oh, it's dreadful, sir," said she, arranging the bedside table, "I shouldn't go on in this weather if I were you."

"I don't think I will. Will it matter if I stay here till about twelve?"

"Oh no, sir, missus told me to tell you."

"Could you by any chance get me a writing-block?"

"Oh yes, sir."

I had eaten my egg and drunk my coffee when she returned. "Will this do?" she asked, thrusting on me a dainty packet of violet envelopes and notepaper smelling of scented soap.

"Perfectly," I assured her, "if I wanted to write letters. But I wanted something much larger and no envelopes."

"Do you mean scribble?"

"I expect so."

In five minutes she was back with the very thing: it had lines on and was called "Champion Pine White Wove." I got her to fetch me two supplementary cushions and settled down to write a story exhibiting the absurdity of fashions in Art. Feeling very ironical I began by writing across the first page in large capitals the title (using my second and third fingers still):

A PLAIN UNVARNISHED TALE

and off I started.

Thus I began, and the tarnished pages are with me now. But before I went any farther I rang the bell. "Mary," I said, "bring me twenty Gold Flakes now, a whisky-and-soda at twelve o'clock, my lunch at one, and, if it isn't inconvenient, call me and get me a bath ready at half-past five o'clock." "Very well, sir," she said, as though this sort of thing happened

every day; she carried out instructions and at five I was finished.

I

Tony Buckley kept a small Art Gallery. He had not always kept an Art Gallery, and although interested in Art he didn't really want to keep an Art Gallery; his fundamental desire being to live on his father's means, do no work at all, have a small flat in Half Moon Street, buy an occasional modern painting or etching, collect an occasional piece of old Chinese porcelain or modern Swedish or Lalique glass, have a shiny black-and-white bathroom with glass shelves to support any number of oils, scents, salts, and even medicines, give an occasional cocktail-party which would bring into service his numerous occasional tables, belong to two or three decent clubs with enough pale-faced, horn-rimmed spectaclad Oxford friends in them (the poor employed in Museums, the rich Museum-minded) to provide him with intelligent, languid, high-voiced conversation, go out to intellectual cinemas with a few girls who did not too tiresomely insist that he should be a male, take tea occasionally with aged and sympathetic widows who adored him as a person of taste and feeling, have a polite, if taciturn, manservant, silk sheets, a silver tray and translucent porcelain for his morning tea, an enormous press for his coats and trousers, with shelves for his socks, handkerchiefs, collars and ties—and, indeed, everything that a young man about town

should have. In youth he had every expectation that such would be his lot. He was an only son; his mother doted on him; his father was immensely rich and had a noble mansion, park and shoot in Northamptonshire and in Scotland a river and forest second to none. He went to Eton, where he did not distinguish himself but made intelligent friends. He went to Oxford, where he did not take a degree but made intelligent friends. When he had been at Oxford a year the war broke out. Tony, with a wry face, joined the 25th battalion of a county regiment and made ultimately, if with more resignation than enthusiasm, a quite good infantry officer. He was not wounded, but he was mentioned once in despatches—of which even he was a little proud, though he preferred Sheraton chairs very much as against the makeshifts he had to sit upon in dug-outs. But he was intensely distressed when he learnt that the Germans had burned the Roumanian oil-wells, and distressed even more, later on, when he learnt that the Bolsheviki had seized both the oilfields of the Caucasus and the mines of Siberia. For in all those quarters his father's enormous investments lay: and on Armistice Day his father died.

Tony came back to England to find nothing left for him. His mother had retired to a Bournemouth private hotel on a small annuity. All that was saved from the wreck for himself was a paltry two thousand pounds, the interest on which would be barely sufficient to pay for his ties and his club subscriptions, let alone Merry and Berry and Lock, who still so venerably juxtapose their saddles and wines and hats at the

bottom of St. James's Street. The point was: what was he to do? Dreadful though it was, he had to earn a living.

2

He tried several things, after he had definitely discovered that his mother simply couldn't spare another penny. Motor-salesmanship was his first attempt; but the slump had hit the trade hard and Eton and Harrow Motors, Ltd., sounded so expensive that most people did not dare enter the place and latest-acquired old school-fellows had to be the first to be dismissed. He had a dip into old furniture, and even for a week travelled biscuits in an Austin Seven. Then he suddenly saw an avenue. A Cézanne was coming up at Christie's. An old and rich friend, who had villas in Rome, Florence and Venice, but only an occasional perch at Claridge's in London, wanted to buy it. In a generous moment Bertie Finch said: "Tony, old thing, I shall have to pay somebody a commission for buying it for me, why shouldn't it be you? You've got your head screwed on; one or two of them have let me down; the thing's right enough—it will just fit into my little drawing-room over the Forum—my limit is five thousand." Tony went; he bid; he conquered; he collected his commission. He saw an opening at last. "After all," he meditated, "somebody has to get a profit on all the pictures which happen to be fashionable at the moment, so why shouldn't it be I?" He mobilized his capital, jeopardized his income, took a little shop in Earl Street,

and started his series of exhibitions with a scratch lot of Matisse and Picasso drawings which he had picked up luckily and cheaply (apart from which, some of them were doubtful!) at the end of the autumn auctioneering season, and a roomful of woodcuts, angular and daring, by a young woman who paid for her show herself and knew everybody in London. Everybody she knew bought one of Mavis's drawings (though towards the end there were wry faces because all the cheapest ones had gone) and Tony, though he had not yet learned how exorbitant a commission a gallery proprietor should charge if he is really to be in the first rank, made enough out of them to pay for his first year's rent. Nothing succeeds (as may possibly have been remarked before) like success, and, thenceforward, Tony found no difficulty in keeping his galleries full and the Press interested. First, he got, without effort on his own part, all the rich semi-amateurs; then he got the kind of well, if garishly, dressed young artist whose clothes, looks, or connections (or all of them) make him "Willy" or "Hamish" at all the cocktail-parties about which the snob-columnists write; then he collected and launched a successful show of the survivors of the Post-Impressionist Movement; then he dared a Barbizon show; then he joined in the Boudin revival; and at last, having accumulated some money and a great reputation for taste, acumen, and honesty of dealing, he began to glimpse that Eldorado in which dwell those who (keeping eagle eyes open for deaths and death-duties) buy Primitives (Italian or Flemish), Titians, Rembrandts and portraits by Reynolds, Gainsborough and Lawrence for anything up to £80,000

apiece and sell them for anything up to £100,000 apiece. After which, why have a shop? You just hang a few things in your private house and ask Mr. Huggenheimer to dinner.

Tony Buckley had just reached this verge of the ultimate prosperity and happiness, and was sitting in his little back office (like Alnaschar with his tray) dreaming of a recovered freedom and a final farewell to commerce, like Wolsey's to greatness, when his dreams were rudely shattered. James came in: "Sorry, sir," he said, "but there's a lady to see you with some pictures and she won't go away."

"Who is she?" asked Tony.

"She says she's called Agrippina Mandeville," said James.

"I'm busy," said Tony, impatiently if mendaciously; "tell her to come back some other time."

"I did, sir," said James, a distant beaten look on his pale thin, prematurely old face, "but she said, 'Go to blazes! I've got to see Mr. Buckley.'"

"Oh, tell her I'm not here!" snapped Tony, with as near an approximation to anger so mild and well-bred as he could achieve.

"I did, sir," answered James, "but she only said, 'Tell that to the marines! I can see him through the glass door. You can't take me in, my man—my brother was at school with him, and I've seen him often.'"

"Oh, bring her in then," remarked Tony wearily; "I suppose I can get rid of her somehow!"

James brought her in. She sat down in the spare chair without being asked, took a cigarette from the

box on the table, fumbled in her bag for a match which the surprised Tony, remembering his manners, at last produced, closed her eyes, puffed several times in order to make sure that her cigarette was drawing, and then looked at Tony with large, brilliant dark eyes. He was fascinated.

It wasn't her beauty that fascinated him—though in her thin, hectic, aquiline, red cheek-boned, sensitive-lipped, untidy yet distinguished way she was certainly beautiful. No: it was her madness that fascinated him. He was alone with a madwoman and did not even dare to call for James.

All this passed through his mind in a second which seemed like an age. Then, staring at him with almost loving eyes and a slow compelling smile, she said: "Of course, you know what I've come for?"

He pulled himself together with a jerk.

"Well, of course, yes," said he. "Your name is Miss Agrippina Mandeville, and James tells me you've brought some pictures to show me. Naturally, I shall be delighted to see them."

"You'd better be," she observed quietly, as she lowered her lids and opened her portfolio, "for you've got to both show 'em and sell 'em."

Her specimens were produced. She had oil-paintings too, she explained; these were only a few examples of her unframed water-colours, but by no means the best, but quite enough to show what she could do. Tony took them and turned them over, bewildered, staggered. In his youth, he dimly remembered, he had seen things like these in the windows of provincial art-shops (which

were also picture-frame makers); local products, the grand metropolitan windows being occupied by coloured engravings of "The Roll-Call," "The Thin Red Line" and "Floreat Etona!"

There were herbaceous borders, every flower dabbed in most recognizable; there were little maids in pinafores plucking primroses or, aprons extended, looking up ladders on the top of which their brothers or sisters were plucking apples; there were goose-girls on commons, and tinies playing with bunnies—all were painted in the exact and unimaginative style of the ladies who once got hung in a Minor Room at the Academy in 1870. Tony hated being rude to women; and he guessed that this particular woman was an especially sad and luckless one. Also he was beginning, in a curious vague way, to be afraid of her. But his connoisseur's conscience was fully awake, and he bravely said:

"I'm extraordinarily sorry, Miss Mandeville, these things are very lovely in their way. But we dealers are obliged rather to specialize—my own clients prefer either Old Masters or ultra-modern pictures—and though I myself much prefer the straightforward kind of representation of really beautiful things that you do, I think that you would be much better advised to go to Cohen's in Bond Street or Jones's in Leicester Square."

Quite suddenly he found himself looking into the dark cavernous mouth of a revolver, held in an unflinching hand, behind which was Miss Mandeville's beautiful, consumptive, mocking, maniacal face.

"Oh, is that how the land lies?" she observed, with

icy precision. "I will give you exactly sixty seconds to think again. I have a wrist-watch, but I shan't bother to look at it. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . ."

"I say!" said Tony feverishly, "can't you let me think for a minute or two? I mean, I might ring somebody up—and there's . . ."

"Ten . . . eleven . . . twelve . . ." counted Miss Mandeville.

"But—I mean, there's always this, that, and the . . ."

"Sixteen . . . seventeen . . . eighteen . . ." said Miss Mandeville.

"Look here!" cried Tony, "can't you, for a moment, put that beastly thing down, and just let's talk together and see what's best to be done——"

"Twenty-three . . . twenty-four . . . twenty-five . . ." said Miss Mandeville.

Tony screamed. "Oh, stop, stop, stop! I'll do anything!"

The revolver was still three feet from his head and pointing straight.

"Do you really mean that?" asked Miss Mandeville, screwing her eyes together and smiling with her lips.

"I do! I do! I do!" protested Tony.

The revolver was still levelled.

"On your word of honour as a gentleman?" asked Miss Mandeville, "I don't mean picture-dealer, but gentleman?"

Tony flung both arms into the air.

"I promise anything you want!" he shouted.

She was pacified. She put the revolver into her bag

with lipstick, handkerchief, pocket-mirror and keys, and quietly observed:

"Well, now we're getting down to business. Tomorrow, which is the 13th, I shall send you fifty oil-paintings and ninety-four water-colours, and my show opens on the 28th. Ever since your Gallery opened I've meant to have a show here. I leave it to you to fix the prices—you know far more about that kind of thing than I do. Have you got a match?"

He gave her one, and she went. He put his head between his hands.

3

Ten o'clock in Earl Street, St. James's. Tony arrived from Ryder Street punctual to the moment—as he was punctual with his morning tea, his rising, his use of the lemon-verbena bath salts which could only be bought in the Royal Opera Arcade, his consumption of kidneys and bacon, his donning of a carnation, and his ringing for the lift. He paused for a moment, in intense gloom, outside his shop. Yes, James had been punctual too; the bills were already up on the discreet little hoarding outside the shop. They were fresh as paint ("Paint indeed!" he reflected bitterly) and they announced that within was to be seen an Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Agrippina Mandeville. Ruin stared him in the face, though Honour was saved. His friends, dropping casually in one by one, would look astonished at the ghastly show, assume the appearance of dying

codfish, shake hands limply with their eyes wandering and walk out, never to see him again, but to tell their friends (over dry sherries in their clubs) either that Tony Buckley had suddenly gone off his head or that Tony Buckley had always really been a pretender and that his bogusness (or should it be "bogusity?" he reflected with a despairing curl of the lip) had been exposed at last. At any rate, he was done for; and all his hopes of gradually, through good taste, tact, social connections and an ability to talk to Americans, becoming another Colnaghi, Agnew, Duveen or Hugh Lane scattered to the winds. Hope slightly revived when he remembered that he had never engaged when he made the fatal promise to send out cards either to the public or to the Press. Usually his Private Views were crowded with dowager duchesses, Prime Ministers' widows, middle-aged Foreign Office men with monocles, young fashionables who had gone on the stage in order to earn the wherewithal for oysters, lobsters, caviare and cocktails, under-secretaries, and resolute old ladies who were jolly well determined that, until extreme unction was given them, they were not going to be left out of anything where everybody else, who was anybody, was. They none of them ever bought anything. They just smoked cigarettes (in spite of the "No Smoking" notice), grabbed each other by the biceps, made hasty luncheon and dinner dates, and generally shouted, "Emily, darling!" and "Bob, darling!" all over the place. But although they did not—and most of them, poor things, no longer could—buy anything themselves, they did tell other people.

Time and again, after an unprofitable Private View, sitting alone like Marius amid the ruins of Rome, Tony had leapt to his feet as a frog-faced, fussy, bespectacled financial magnate had stridden into the Gallery, all astrakhan and Rolls, and—in the self-conscious manner in which the uneducated opulent address their superior inferiors, the educated poor—informed him that the Duchess of Dorset or Mrs. Portcullis had told him to buy a picture from Mr. Buckley's remarkable show. "I've got a little place up the river—I should like something about three feet by two; have you got any sunsets?" They usually took something and Tony always kicked himself when he remembered their suspicious faces as he told them the real prices he was charging instead of asking the preposterously large sums that they were accustomed to give to the worst daubers in the Royal Academy.

"All over," thought Tony. "I haven't asked anybody, but somebody's sure to turn up. And then I shall have to fly the country, and go to one of the Colonies, if there is still any Colony willing to take anybody from this country. I wonder if there are any openings in Mauritius or the Falkland Islands?"

He was wandering aimlessly about, after vaguely fingering some unsold modern sculptures by a young Chelsea artist who reduced birds and beasts to their quite unrecognizable, but highly convincing and symbolical, essentials when he heard a gust at the swing-door. And there, pouring in, a turbulence of rakish hat, darting eyes, aquiline nose, about-to-be-double chin, ample bosom, and a general clutter of necklaces,

rings, bracelets, amber drop earrings and just possible red hair, was Lady Margarine Dunlop—most noted of all patrons of the latest developments in the perpetually progressing evolution on Art, which has advanced from Michelangelo to Finkelstein in next to no time.

"This is the end," thought Tony; but, remembering the trenches, he pulled himself together and moved towards the door with the sympathetic smile and welcoming hand of the professional dealer in works of art.

4

Lady Margarine Dunlop, that large, talkative, effusive, dominating woman, who knew all about everything which had happened in the last twenty years, liked modern pictures and intellectual young men—and was quite able to pay for both. Rich in her own right, she had married Sir Guy Dunlop, a hereditary City magnate, who was richer still and gave her all she wanted. Her parties were the most celebrated of all in that quarter of London where fashion, art, letters, and the most intelligent parts of both Toryism and Bolshevism meet; her cook was excellent; her wines were good; she could always offer her guests the best cigars, though they seldom smoked them; and her husband was invariably absent. Occasionally some visitor got a glimpse of him. He was such a very great magnate that it really did not matter if he went to the City at all; he had, what we are told is the greatest of all gifts in a great genius, the

power of Delegation. The result was that, now and then, some guest of Lady Margarine's turning up early, either because the taxi-man had been forgetfully quick, or because he hadn't a watch, or because he really wanted a private word with and further invitations from his hostess, would catch a glimpse of Sir Guy nipping out of the hall into his car, clad in plus-fours on his way to a golf-course, and receive from him a hazy nod of pretended recognition. The Dunlops went their own ways. That they had met on occasion there were no fewer than four pieces of evidence—three girls and the heir to the baronetcy. When, in the ordinary way, they conversed, nobody could suggest. It certainly couldn't have been at breakfast; with her tray and the telephone Lady Margarine was fully occupied until it was time for her hairdresser, her milliner, or an early call at an art exhibition. It couldn't be at lunch, tea, or dinner, because she was always either out or entertaining. The only possible assumption was that they occasionally got thrown together when they were away for week-ends in the country. At all events, it is highly unlikely that Sir Guy cared for the pictures and *objets d'art* with which his wife filled their house, and just as likely that he never noticed them.

Lady Margarine playfully slapped Tony's hand. "You naughty man," she reproached him. "Why didn't you tell me you had a new show on?" Tony writhed.

"I don't mind telling you, in confidence," he said, "that I don't want you to see it. I'm just having a quiet week with some awful rustic paintings—just to oblige a

friend—well, a kind of relation, I mean. Look at them if you must, but at your own risk!”

She sailed to the main wall, and he followed, watching her peer at “A Surrey Garden,” “A Garden in Surrey,” “Hollyhocks,” and “The Pet Calf” through her lorgnette and then she suddenly screamed with delight.

“But, Tony!” she screamed, “they’re absolutely lovely! They’re *period*! The painter’s a genius—nobody could possibly guess they weren’t done fifty years ago. And me just going to do up the back drawing-room as a Mid-Victorian Room!”

To Tony’s surprise, and dawning delight, she ran to his desk and telephoned to four people in quick succession, telling them they simply must come at once to Earl Street. She bought six pictures at once; in the afternoon the Gallery was quite full of elegant women and indolent young men, all exclaiming: “Aren’t they perfect!” “Aren’t they marvellous!” “Aren’t they absolutely 1870!” “Aren’t they too sweet!” and “Tony, you simply must bring her to lunch.”

For two days picture after picture went at steadily rising prices, and people simply couldn’t tire of saying how wonderful was Tony’s flair for the very latest thing.

Nor was this all: far from it. Sir Guy, strolling through his drawing-room, found his attention caught by a little picture which tore at his heart-strings, so strongly did the “Cottage Garden” (with white palings and old lady complete) remind him of the dawn of sentiment in his boyhood’s home at Surbiton. He had a library in which there were no books; he sent his wife a

note, got an answer, and within an hour he was at Tony's, buying hard; while by the end of the week a golf-club, full of his opulent friends, who had never dared protest to their wives about being surrounded by Cubism and Expressionism, had cleaned out the Show, and embarked on that slippery slope that always awaits rich brokers who begin cordial relations with a picture-dealer.

Miss Mandeville was vindicated and pacified; Tony had made a large profit; he had realized once and for all that it was his job to discover what people wanted, rightly or wrongly. He has already led up to several Sir Joshuas, with very good hopes, and actually sold many old Academy pictures normally unsaleable in the auction-rooms, and he lives in expectation of ultimately giving a wing to the National Gallery and becoming a peer.

The moral of this story has so often been pointed that it is hardly worth while pointing it again.

"There now," I said to myself as I finished, "nobody can say you have been idle to-day."

"Nonsense!" sneered the demon, "it was all an excuse for staying in bed, and you didn't take any real trouble about it."

I searched for my answer among the usual roses and true-lovers'-knots of the wallpaper. "Anyhow, I *was* doing something," I answered lamely.

"Only because you hadn't anything to read and you would have been too bored to stay in bed if you hadn't written. You only worked for laziness' sake."

"Have it your own way. I was never any good at arguing with quibblers."

As I dressed I took consolation to myself. I remembered a remark which had haunted me for nearly twenty years. I was at a luncheon-party in Cavendish Square at Mr. Asquith's, then newly fallen from his high estate, but sage and humorous as ever. Somebody, I think the blind Sir Arthur Pearson, observed that a scientist had said that if somebody in South Africa should discover a lump of radium the size of a man's head it would do all the work in the world. "I am not sure that it would be a good idea," said Mr. Asquith. Often since I have wondered whether it could really be true that we should all be up to mischief if we hadn't to work: the corollary being that the ideal state of things would compel every man to sleep for eight hours and dig or what-not for sixteen.

"No," I said to myself, "I at least could safely be released from all necessity of labour."

* * * *

When I got down to the bar, which had just opened, with a watery afternoon sunlight filtering through the windows, the barmaid greeted me with, "Good evening. Had a nice night's rest?" "Yes," I said, "a pint of bitter, please. And perhaps this gentleman would like one too," I added, noticing that the only other occupant of the bar, an obvious lorryman, was draining his glass. "Thanks," he said, approaching me, "are you the gent wot's hikin'?"

"Yes."

"Going on to-night?"

"To-morrow, I think."

"Where?"

"Taunton."

"I'm going there now if you'd like a lift?"

"Could you wait five minutes?"

"Ten if you like."

I packed, paid, apologized, and was ready; the driver courteously accepted "one for the road." We went out and mounted a gigantic covered van. As soon as we had rattled out of the town he cheerfully said that, of course, he wasn't allowed to give me a lift, really. The insurance companies didn't like it, he said, as we whizzed round a corner, and wouldn't pay up if there was an accident. Besides, there were all those girls chaps picked up at coffee-stalls on the main roads. A bad lot they were.

There was, what with the jolting and the conversation, not much chance of admiring the landscape. Just before Taunton he asked me to dismount, though he was quite willing for me to go on if I would masquerade as one of his directors on a holiday. I was glad to get off.

I did not feel like an early couch, and played snooker late with some men who were Freemasons in the house of one of them some miles from the town. It was a good distance, and I was taken to and fro in a car in the dark. They introduced each other to me, but I don't think remembered to ask my name. One of them, whichever it was, was a very open-handed host. The billiard room was full of the heads of koodoo,

sable antelope, eland, and dik-dik, and on each side of the marker was the vast open-mouthed club-toothed visage of a hippopotamus. But it hardly seemed the time and place to express my opinions about the wantonness of shooting harmless wild-beasts.

ELEVENTH DAY

I DON'T know what time the lark got up, but, as for me, I rose pretty early, all things considered. After a quick walk to the two great rose-pink towers, noble though rebuilt, I set out on the last stage of my journey on the road through Wellington to Tiverton, which I had taken so many times before, not sorry to be strapping my now shapeless pack on my back for the last time, its bulk having greatly swollen through the periodic acquisition of new minor garments.

I had just reached the tangled junction of roads at the west end of the town when I thought to myself that the first part of the walk was not very interesting, that I wanted to saunter through the second part, and that I must get to Tiverton by tea-time. So I took the next train that stopped at Wellington and had but thirteen or fourteen miles to go.

I was tempted by the climb to the Wellington Monument on the edge of the Black Down Hills, but forwent it and pushed on along a road a great deal more frequented by motors than it used to be.

Now I looked around me at the country, growing more and more like Devonshire every mile, and now (though it is seldom I indulge in the luxury of enjoyments or otherwise to come) I thought how certain I was as to how I should spend the evening. The school would be shut. The only people I knew in the

neighbourhood would be away, and anyhow I could not call dinner-jackets from the vasty deep. It was all Lombard Street to a China Orange (I wish someone would explain that phrase to me!) that I should, after dining, spend the evening, whether joining-in or merely overhearing, with a number of men in real or imagined riding-breeches talking about the Devon and Somerset Staghounds.

I came to a gate on a rise, went inside, sat down, and began to eat my sandwiches, looking at the distant hills. I was on the border of the county and already I could almost smell the washes, pink, yellow, cream and white, of the cob houses and the flowers in the rich cottage-gardens. "Why," thought I to myself, thinking of my story of the day before, "should cottage gardens be left to the bad painters? Why should apples on a tree not be painted and flowers as they grow, nodding to each other behind the palings, blue and yellow and red; but only flowers, boldly generalized, in urban glass or china, and apples, anæmic on trays with beer bottles beside them, tamed, bled and sicklied by the denizens of Charlotte Street and the Café du Dôme, all aping that able man who had a mania for reducing all things to structure, to anatomy, to bone and plane?"

Countless cottage gardens, farm gardens, gardens of modest old houses, I remembered from my youth, secluded by walls, half-screened by fences, or merging hedgeless into long orchard grass where jonquils grew under the spangled shadows of the apple-trees. It is almost unbearable pain to see them now; the Canterbury bells and sweet-williams in their season, the hollyhocks

in theirs, the asters and dahlias in theirs, the marigolds gallantly living till autumn tears their last rags away; for their timelessness so forcibly contrasts with irrecoverable memories of days when they were first seen and stared at. But it would be worse if they went too; if one knew that the last wrinkled old dame in the last sun-bonnet had tended the last amaryllis in a cottage window. I thought, with tears in my eyes, of all the long holidays of youth, moss-roses in the gardens, shells on the beaches, bluebells in the deep woods, heather, furze and whortleberries under the rocks of the great tors, black pools, boys, dead or scattered, with whom I had wandered everywhere, knowing nothing at all except the things worth knowing. I stared across the valley not counting time.

A car stopped behind the hedge. People laughed. They had the wireless on.

"Pascal avait son gouffre avec lui se mouvant."

* * * *

I left the main Exeter Road at Sampford Peverell, where the street is worthy of the name. I had half a mind to turn north to Holcombe Rogus, where is that rare thing in Devon, a late fifteenth-century stone house with tower and hall; only in our day has the family which built it left it, as another left Montficute. But I went on, and came to Holberton, which was almost as far as one could walk on half-holidays between lunch and roll-call or roll-call and tea; and then, on the top of a hill, which used to be the turning-point of our practice runs for rugger, I could see the whole valley

and the wooded hills all around and glimpses of buildings which were the school.

Every hedge and turning brought back the past more vividly than unassisted memory ever will.

* * * *

I walked past the playing-fields and the houses. I passed the Chapel and Big School. I wanted to go in by the main gates.

I went in. There was nobody about. The square tower still stood there, its red sandstone as calm and kind as ever; and the great high trees on their lawns on the hither side of it, and the long line of mullioned windows, sunlit or blue-bough-shadowed, stretching away to the right, and the chapel far back on the left, with a new memorial cross in front of it that had no need to be there in my time.

There was no sound from beyond the roofs of a ball being kicked or bumping, no echoes of the old cries of "Take it with you forwards," no distant shrillness of whistle.

The stones and the leaves were the same. Other boys would be there in a month. The man who used to blow the whistle would be there no more.

A mist came in front of me and I saw forms long dead or strayed. Boys swarmed up the drive in strange bowler hats. Boys ran out at the news of motor-cars. Boys sat late in their studies making coffee. Boys told stories to each other in dark dormitories, creepy stories which made them spring up with stopped hearts when strange wailings came from gas-meter or radiator.

Fags came back from farms loaded with eggs, cream and flowers. People, over beyond the Tower, played fives. Others were in the tuck-shop. And Willy was there.

* * * *

I pulled myself up. It was I that had changed. The old things would endure. Even now there were boys who would return thirty years hence and not a stick or stone would have altered. Only themselves. Less merry, less confident, with older hearts and knowing too late the meaning of words that sounded empty to boyish ears: "if youth but knew." And sad will be the song within them if they come, as I, when the place is empty. It is better to come when there is distraction.

I found someone who let me into School House. I went down the zigzagging corridor past studies with strange names on the doors, and at last, feeling like a burglar, opened the door of the one at the end, which was ours.

Some of the chairs seemed to be familiar. Football and cricket groups did not seem to be so much in favour as of old. There was little difference in the books on the shelves; the fevers of London seemed to have left this study at least unscathed. Whatever photographs of handsome mothers, plump sisters, and fathers in uniform there may have been had been stored away in cupboards.

There wasn't much to see. And then I suddenly remembered. With a pocket-knife (for the yellow dressing stone was almost as soft as the red sandstone)

FADING

I had carved my name on the window-sill. Could it still be there?

It was. I could read "J. C. SQ"; and a few strokes were still visible after it.

EPILOGUE

It was just a year after. I had finished that last sentence, musing after I had set it down on an earlier youth now much more vivid and present than it was in my late teens, when childhood would have seemed very far behind and very dim had I ever even have thought of it—much reading of other and more grown men's experiences having superseded and overlaid the fresh experiences, discoveries of friendship, of love, of beauty in sky, sea, earth, shell, weed and caterpillar, then so neglected because they had belonged to an outgrown and despised infancy. It was time to take a holiday again, and I obtained the horse.

First, since I was going off in the train of Celia Fiennes, of Lord Torrington and of Cobbett, I had to have some saddle-bags. I suppose they may still be purchasable in that district between St. James's and Lower Regent Street which still contains Merry, Berry and Lock, like pretty maids all in a row, Mr. McMaster the print-dealer, certain eminent dealers in anglers' gear, and certain merchants of wine and cigars; and which till very recently even housed a firm which proudly displayed in its window nothing but a few royal heads of red deer and dealt in nothing but braces, which it had probably sold to Pierce Egan, John Barclay, Lord Frederick Beauclerk and Squire Osbaldestone.

But the necessity of searching that pleasantly ante-

EPILOGUE

diluvian district was removed from me. For Tschiffely offered to lend me some saddle-bags.

They were not the great packs which accompanied him when he took two years going from Buenos Ayres to New York, with two stout horses which alternately bore the burden of this Cowboy Swiss himself and that of his food, blankets and bags of doubloons—facing wild Indians, climbing the Andes, swimming the rivers full of alligators, penetrating to jungle-buried cities of the Aztecs, and, in the end, risking their lives on the main motor-roads of the United States, where an equestrian traveller was regarded as one cocking an antiquated snook at the modern moving world. No: it was a humble pair which he had used on his little mare Violet when he went through England; two little sacs like those in which the bees carry honey, which were strapped to the front of the saddle—one of them having room for the toilet apparatus of the horse and the other for my own tooth-brush, spare pyjamas, spare shirt, spare socks, and map. Even that amount of apparatus is sufficient to attract attention and even to arouse wonderment on an English road to-day. And all the more so if you happen to go off on the sort of horse I took. For he was a huge flea-bitten grey, as distinctive in appearance as in character.

I first saw him in a field with several others. The owner pointed out one or two quiet-looking cobs grazing around as being suitable for my purpose, which was that of a walking-pace holiday.

Suddenly I caught his rolling eye. He was larger and older than any of them and, ceasing to munch, peered

sidelong towards us. I caught his eye. He at once turned, came trotting up, and put his nose into my pocket, where there was neither carrot nor sugar. "This is the one I must have," I said. "Well," replied the owner, "I didn't think I'd let him go, but you can have him." He had been in the Scots Greys; nobody knew what his original name was, so they called him "Grandfather"; he could still jump, was hacked about a bit by bank-managers' wives, and occasionally had a day out with the Old Berkeley and enjoyed it. But for some years he had always slept at home.

I looked at the horse; he looked back at me with the intelligence of one of Swift's Houhnhynms; intelligent co-operation seemed to be promised; and it was arranged that he should come to me three days before I was to start in order that I, who had not been on a horse for fifteen years, should get used to him. I took him out for an hour each day, and his set convictions were soon revealed. He was quite all right if he was going towards his home, and, with a sigh, could be urged to go along a road which led away from it. But as soon as there was a turning which led back to his quarters he stopped dead, peered round in enquiry, and only proceeded when lustily jabbed in the ribs by my spurless heels.

I rode him for a week or so. I left Chesham on the first hot day of the first hot week of the year; and, as long as it lasted, for all his propensity to be as faithful to his home as the magnet to the pole, and to fight his martingale, it was enjoyable. The road, that first day, was too heavily metalled for anything but a walk or an occasional jog-trot; that I did not mind, as I was seeing

EPILOGUE

the beechwoods, and hill and valley over the hedges. But already, going down the long steep hill into Great Missenden, I realized that there were more motors on the road than there used to be, and, at the bottom, another modern complication set in. There was a road leading back sharply southwards; there was a single-line stream of heavy lorries coming towards us; workmen were laying drains behind lines of ropes; and there was a cumbersome "Stop-Go" board which a man periodically tilted round.

He tried to turn home. With two gyrations I got him back, and addressed him to the green "Go." Just as we were entering the narrow defile the red "Stop" came round, and the great vans clanking through, and I had to haul him round. I wouldn't let him go forward and I wouldn't let him go back: reined up he mused, "What kind of undecided idiot am I carrying?" I couldn't explain to him about County Councils and one-way traffic; I simply had to appear a lunatic to him, and call him an ass until, at last, after several repetitions of the pantomime (for lorries don't wait), time, place and loved one all came together and I got him through into the street. At the far end, up the hill, I turned left on the Hampden and Risborough road. It was a beautiful ride. All those miles there is scarcely a cottage; nothing more than an occasional farmhouse or two, the steep undulations of the Chilterns, and sometimes deep woods on both sides. With a loose rein I went on, dreaming.

Late in the afternoon, on the high hill above Whyteleaf, I turned him through a gap of the ragged hedges and stopped for five minutes above one of the noblest

views in the Home Counties. All the wide vale of Aylesbury was spread below us, with a group of trees to the left emphasizing the height of the escarpment and the vastness of the distance, the chalk overlooking the clay as it does from the North and South Downs over the Weald. The bastions of Chinnor and Bledlow were on the left; I realized that in an afternoon I had come from the new England to the old, that in all the miles below me, with tiny roofs spaced among fields and woods, away and away till the haze veiled all, the little towns were as they had always been, except for half-hearted fringes, and the cows infinitely more numerous than the season-ticket-holders. And this was still Buckinghamshire which in one corner, near London, had its Slough of Despond, and in another its scabrous gash of High Wycombe, but here drifted off towards Oxfordshire and Northants, primitive still, with Thame and Bicester near its borders, the height of Brill in its north-western corner, and, north of Aylesbury the fenny, empty lands, full of slow streams, that lead to Olney where Cowper's house still stands, in which he kept his tame hares and boiled his watch while carefully observing the egg in his hand; a land where it was "always afternoon" and still is, in Brill and Long Crendon, and the remote parish with the perfect Norman church.

"Old Horse," I said, "I don't believe they can spoil this. The trains won't be able to get them to London in time."

He turned his head. "I don't mind waiting a little," observed his great eye, "but could I nibble a little of that bush?"

"Have it your own way," I agreed. "It looks rather poisonous. But animals are supposed to know what is good for them." I checked, remembering certain cattle with yew trees; and my three goats who died years ago, in agony, because the garden-boy, wishing to give them a treat, had fed them with rhododendron and laurel in a kind of mash or minestrone. However, "Mithridates he died old," and this grey knew his way about.

He wrenched out great sprays with determined teeth; the deep hollows above his eyes worked as he chewed. He was content and I consoled. In the big towns and in committee rooms, on the arterial roads and the Sussex coast, it seems as though nothing can be done to stop the pollution of the populations; but here, no more than forty miles from London, the prospect was untainted and still slept in peace.

Down the long hill we wound. I asked my way of a dignified old man with side-whiskers and a stick, and, after threading two lanes full of thatched cottages and little gardens full of flowers, found the entrance to a friend's house. I rode up the path between palings, dismounted, and knocked. My involuntary hostess-to-be came to the door. "What on earth have you got there?" she asked.

"A horse," I said. "Do you think you can put us up for the night?"

"We can put *you* up, since we know you don't mind roughing it, but we haven't any place for a horse."

"Aren't there any stables at the pub?"

"There was one, but it's been turned into a garage."

"Isn't there a farmer near?"

"I daresay Mr. Jinks would put him up. Could he stay out in a field?"

"Rather!"

We led him a quarter of a mile and found a farmer; unsaddled him, groomed him, watered him and turned him out into an immense acreage containing several cows, several horses and the lushest of grass. He began eating at once.

My host was a politician of definitely Left propensities; it says much for his hospitality that we managed to talk about Spain (which, in a world full of snarls, had now superseded Abyssinia) without acerbity. After dinner I began to realize that I was getting stiffer and stiffer. At ten I asked if I might go to bed. I could hardly get up the stairs. I had not remembered that it was fifteen years since I had bestridden a steed and that one couldn't resume such pastimes as though there had been no interval. I read two pages of a pamphlet about reconstructing the League of Nations; hardly needing that assistance, I fell into deep and unbroken sleep.

* * * *

"Your tea, sir, and madam says would you like your breakfast in bed?"

"I would, but I don't have any breakfast as a rule."

"Not just some eggs?"

"Well, yes, I think I will." I didn't want the eggs, but I wanted to stay in bed.

I read the papers. Even another scalding bath did not unstiffen my thighs or take the ache out of my hip-bones unaccustomed to the stretch of a horse now too

wide for them. When I came downstairs my friend had retired to his study to work; his wife said brightly, "Well, are you going to do your twenty miles to-day?"

"I think not," I replied, as one who was on holiday and was entitled capriciously to change his mind.

"Why not stay another night?"

"No, I simply must work this stiffness off."

"Well, what about staying for lunch and going on afterwards?"

The company was congenial, the armchairs comfortable, the prints on the walls pleasant, the books reassuring, the sunlit branches through the windows enchanting.

"Your horse is quite all right," my hostess resumed. "We've been to see him already. Mr. Jinks says he's made friends with the other horses and looks as if he'd settled down for life. Have a look at the papers while I talk to cook and then come up and see our local landlord."

With great strength of mind I said "Yes"; before long we were going slowly uphill through a village that would have appealed to Birket Foster or Mr. Blunden, and found an empty tap-room looking across the road to a rose-garden. The landlord, a grave and preoccupied man, brought my pint; but I had been warned that he was a retired officer who had served long in India, and by an easy transit through my horse we got to polo. His face was illumined; he visited the back premises and brought out portraits on ponies and groups of moustached men with helmets, and sticks, sitting under verandahs at Peshawar or Ootacamund. But when I

asked him how he liked being an innkeeper his face fell again. The villagers were a good lot but the visitors for meals were all wrong.

"Why?" I asked. "Are they noisy?"

"Oh no, it's not that; it's simply that they won't take the slightest interest in their food. Here am I, keen about cooking and liking cooking myself, prepared to give 'em a variety of soups, fish, omelettes, vegetables, but I have given up asking 'em. They all demand hot roast beef, baked potatoes and cabbage."

"Never anything else?"

"Cold roast beef, sometimes." His eyes gazed absently out of the window as those of Zoo camels seem to gaze at lost desert sands. His thoughts had gone back to jungle, nullah and dak-bungalow, and curries he would never see again.

"It's annoying," he protested, "to find the newspapers always going for the food in inns when it's all the public's fault."

This was a new point of view to me, but on the whole I could not think of the country as being full of hotel-keepers passionate about cuisine and reduced to despair by a dull public which daily and mechanically demands beef and would feel lost without the smell of cabbage; however, it was no good arguing with one of the redeemed.

After lunch and coffee I said good-bye, and went down to the farm to recover the horse. The field was too large, the grass too good, his companions too congenial. Later on he was out twice in smaller fields and was as docile as a lamb; but here, with a rich prairie around him, he

EPILOGUE

was resolved not to be caught. He would graze until we were near enough to see the sidelong roll of his eye, and then swerve round us at full tilt to some far hedge and start grazing again with cows all round him. Reinforcements had to be fetched, and, after he had showed in several runs what a fine three-quarter he would make, he was cornered by a cordon, given an undeserved lump of sugar, and led back to the barn to be saddled.

By the time we were on our way again it was four o'clock; overcast and spitting with rain. I had been told to go to a large old village, an easy distance of six or seven miles, which was notable for its maze of streets, its several central piazzas, the alleged (but unreal) stupidity of its inhabitants and the high mud walls along its lanes which I was assured made it the nearest thing in England to a Nigerian town. The reader may find it himself; it is a long way from its nominal railway station and the motorists haven't yet discovered it: there is local life there.

During the morning a plasterer had told me of an inn to go to. I had to chance it, for it wasn't on the telephone. I found it. The landlord, who had never been visited by a horse, looked at my mount as though it were a giraffe; as we debated, a circle of children gathered round with their fingers in their mouths.

The modesty of my needs was explained. We led the horse into the stable-yard. The stable contained perambulators, timber, and sundries, but the landlord said he would fetch two young men who kept a horse and cart and they would do everything I required.

He fetched them and went back to his quarters. At first sight it was clear that they resembled neither Alexander the master of Bucephalus nor Aristotle the instructor of Alexander. They ineffectively assisted the clearance of the stall, they watched me take off saddle and bridle, they fetched some bedding, they stood vacant while I found, up the yard, a bucket and a pump and brought water down with slop-slop: and when I asked them where I could buy corn they made streetward motions with their thumbs. However, I got the corn; dined; went for a walk through the dim-lit streets and lanes; and got lost as had been forecast.

* * * *

But this book is not about that journey. By short stages I sauntered round the fringes of Bucks, Northants and Oxfordshire. I sat, one lovely morning, on the horse by the windmill at Brill, looking across the valley to that great wall of the Chilterns, and east and west into near infinity. Stopping for lunch in a Northamptonshire hamlet I had this conversation with a lady:

“Can I have lunch?”

“Afraid I cannot manage it.”

“Haven’t you *anything*?”

“No; it’s a pity you didn’t come yesterday; we had a chicken.”

“But isn’t there a village shop where they sell stamps and tinned pressed beef?”

“I could get you some of that. But you’d have to wait half an hour, as my husband’s got to have his dinner first.”

EPILOGUE

I waited, playing desultory darts with the only other customer. I then enjoyed a luncheon of pressed beef, lettuce, tomatoes, and cheese which I should never have obtained without importunity. There was some excuse there; callers were probably almost unknown. But eggs are available everywhere. It is commonly remarked that in some regards the tests for publicans are more severe than those for clergymen. For myself I should like to see it laid down that no one should have a licence without passing an examination in omelettes and salads and guaranteeing to keep grated Parmesan cheese, and not to charge high table-d'hôte prices for these things either.

In Hertfordshire I know a man who must be one of the few Italian publicans in the English countryside. He is an aged man, a retired chef who was at Claridge's, and to see his pleasure in serving minestrone and whatever else one wants, evoked by his own skilled hand, is to have one's own pleasure doubled. This quite apart from his charming frankness and humour, his admirable wife, and the superb pictures of birds and foliage which he makes out of gold, azure, vermilion and green snippets of cigar-bands. Where is there an Anglo-Saxon host like that, jolly companions though many of them are when they talk about racing or the foibles of politicians? But I draw to an end, and closing time.

* * * *

There came, and for the first time in this rainy dismal summer, some days of intense heat. Riding by day in breeches and gaiters was no pleasure, with spectacles

having to be wiped and brow constantly mopped. I stayed one night with friends who inhabit an old tower, last relic, with its moat, of a castle destroyed like so much else of our heritage, by Oliver Williams, alias Cromwell. We tired not merely the sun but almost the stars with talking, and next day lounged under the cedars in deck-chairs, shirt-sleeves and muslin frocks, doing nothing more strenuous between light collations than watching wasps getting entrapped in a row of jam-jars full of beer, sugar, and wine, mixed.

Lazily, towards twilight, I rode off. Seven miles away, I remembered, in a market-town, there was a hostelry where I had been kindly treated over thirty years before, arriving late, on foot, dead tired and without luggage. There would be at least no difficulty about stabling in that town—a hunting centre—and I could certainly find a bed for myself somewhere.

It grew dark. A procession of cars approached me from both directions, blazing with lights, and swerving around my charger, who had no red light on his tail. It was towards closing-time when I drew up at the bar-door and shouted (there was a marked susurrus of conversation coming from within) the unnecessary question: "Is there anybody there?" A lusty voice answered back: "Why can't you come in?" "I can't bring a horse in, can I?" I remarked reasonably.

Out came the landlord, and I got off. Yes, he could put me up, but the horse would have to go somewhere else. "Do you mean to say you haven't got a stable even here?" "We put the grand piano in it last month," he said.

We took the horse elsewhere and tucked him up in a

place full of thoroughbreds. Then I returned, ate bacon and eggs, and went to bed with an omnibus volume of shockers, property of the landlady.

Betimes I went to see the horse. Heat had softened and moistened his skin; the girth had worked forward, and he had a nasty raw gall. "Keep him here until he's healed," I said.

Twice a day I went to see him, to the profit of grocers and fruiterers; as I walked up the yard his vast impassive head awaited me over his door.

At the end of a week he was quite well again.

But meanwhile life had not been standing still with me. I met men with cars who were delighted to drive me to see friends in neighbouring counties. I had been persuaded that I simply must stay for the Horse Show. I had been invited to go to Warwick Races. I had made friends with the Vicar, sat up late with him over a decanter, and found that his chief trouble in life was a plague of bats, who defiled his church and frightened his congregation, and I urged him to write a letter to the Press headed "Bats in the Belfry." I had been lent a gun by a sporting auctioneer and asked out to shoot partridges by friendly farmers. I had fallen into a daily routine of shopping, paper-buying, and dropping in on coteries of leisurely cronies. "Why should I not remain," I thought, "until my holiday is over? this suits me very well; I might go further and fare worse."

Besides, the Fair was coming on in the market-place and I might (in the upshot I won three) win a watch at one of the games of skill. I felt a nostalgia for the blare of a merry-go-round.

In the morning quietude of the bar I consulted the manageress.

"I'm enjoying myself so much here," I said.

"We're so glad."

"I've got into the habits of the place."

"There are worse."

"If I go on with that horse there will only be the same old troubles. Big roads swarming with traffic and too hard for trotting. Side-roads with inns off the telephone, no stabling, and fodder to be fetched."

"Sure to be. Nobody expects horses now and the roads aren't made for them."

"Do you know what I think I'll do? That horse is very fond of his home. I believe I'll telegraph and tell them that I want him boxed back."

"Why don't you?" said she.

